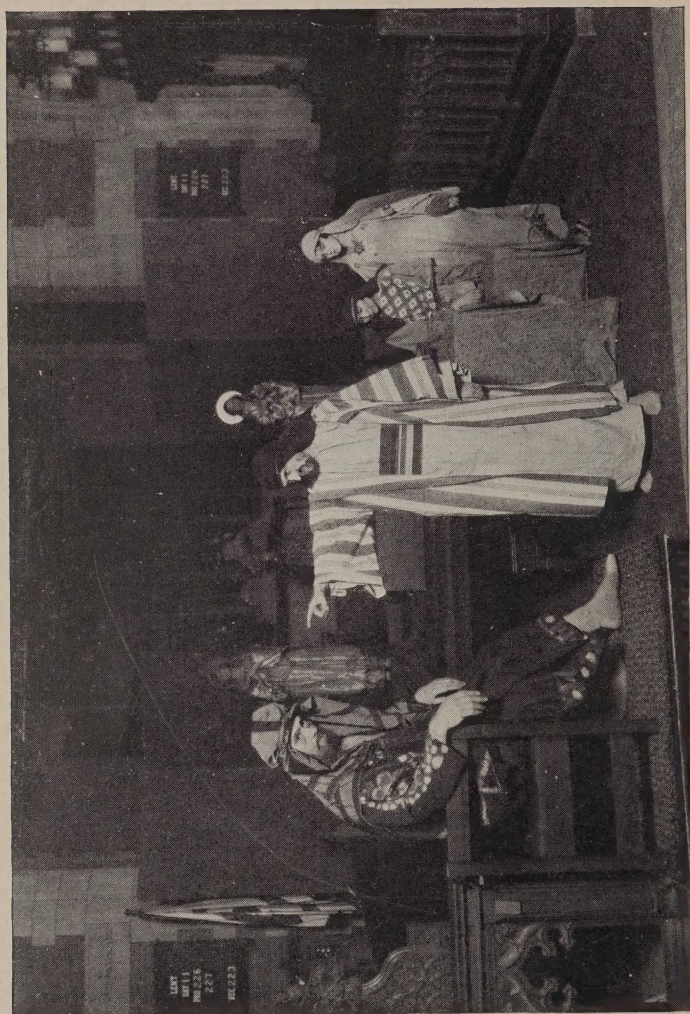
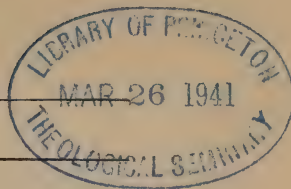


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PULPIT DRAMAS



THE SIMPLICITY OF PRODUCTION NECESSARY FOR A PULPIT DRAMA



PULPIT DRAMAS

*A Series of Dramatizations for
Church, Pulpit or Parish House Use*

BY REV. PHILLIPS ENDECOTT OSGOOD, D.D.

Author of

"Old Time Church Drama Adapted"

"The Sinner Beloved"

ILLUSTRATED



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A PREFATORY APOLOGIUM

I

SERMON SUBSTITUTES

PERHAPS one should say sermon VARIANTS. But "sermons" have come to imply a norm of formal form. They are preached from the pulpit by a preacher who logically or emotionally tells a "message" straight out. Exhortations and instructions are given bluntly and directly. The congregation is supposed to receive the sermon, recognizing its admonitions and accepting its authority. The congregation has come to the sermon with the expectation of settling back to listen to the provided wisdom for the week. Earnest coöperation in group thinking is too seldom demanded of themselves by the sermon-tasters. They seldom realize that they must bring to the sermon their utmost endeavor of creative thought, their best partnership in an unity of discovery. The preacher may fail to enlist the hearers in corporate sincerity of men-

tal adventure. He may tell them too plainly what is their truth and their duty! That is, if it has become a routine habit only to "enjoy the plain gospel."

Now painful truth is in the well-worn truism that one gets out of anything as much as one puts into it. The sermon-taster is a passive beneficiary. The person merely preached to and *AT* is seldom as helped as the team-playing helper in a mutual project.

The author has perhaps worn his urgencies threadbare in the Prefaces to his previous two volumes of religious drama, but he cannot refrain from extending the application of the principle of participation in worship to the sermon. Not for a moment would it be right to counsel the alteration of the normal sermon method. Yet it is advantageous to raise the question whether an occasional variation or substitute may not vitalize the whole sermon process and spread its benefit to the normal sermons, once the congregation has been lifted out of the usual noncoöperative relationship and taught that *ALL* sermons are ideally the mutual concern of preacher and worshiper.

Education has abandoned the old-fashioned system of oracular information, ready-made and imparted. Instead of the former method

of "sound words from Olympus" to be absorbed by docile scholars, we now conduct education by the team-play method of encouraged discoveries. The "project method" gets so far ahead by the enlistment of the child's exploratory interests that we delight to witness the eagerness of the group in its pursuit of living truth. The curriculum is now a curriculum of normal experiences, through which the interests of the scholar are aided by a LEADER.

The new theater has relearned its ancient axiom of the enlisted, participant imagination. Its staging is stimulative to imagination: its technique of play-writing is provocative of deduction. The glare of fierce lighting in the proscenium-insulated days gives place to beauty of shadow and focus, the staging runs to symbolic, suggestive essentials rather than to conglomerate museum minutiae. The person attending the theater has to put himself into the play: the drama enlists his imagination, logic, and participation.

Therefore the sermon may occasionally, to its advantage, alter its attack. The truths with which it deals were originally distilled from life; why not encourage the ability still to distill truth from life? Why not allow a congregation a glimpse of experience and force

it to find out the truth for itself? Why not provide the living data and dare the congregation to find its own sermon between the lines. Occasionally only, of course.

Jesus did this with His parables. The people He confronted were "gospel-hardened" too. They knew all the truisms too well to think of them with fresh minds. They had to be jostled awake. The parables must have been an innovation indeed after the plain words of codified Law. The parables left a man saying to himself: "Now, what did He mean? I can see He had a meaning in that story, and I am supposed to find the cue. Can it be that I am so stupid as not to read His riddle?" One could wish more sermons were vivid bits of life presented without diagrams and moral tags, ending with the smiling challenge, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Would we have more discovering souls? Would we have more real realization of life's inner significance? Only by training deductive discoverers can we hope that men and women will be able to go out into this complex existence round about us, where there are so few oracular interpretations available ready-made, and where people have to use every ability they have to find truth for themselves between the lines.

This is the animus behind this volume of sermon substitutes. The dramatic incidents herein provided claim no revelational infallibility. They are purely imaginary expansions of gospel situations. They deliberately read into the given anecdote what the author believes was the probable emotion and personal equation, but a sermonic theme is also written in, for the congregation to get out if it can.

A sermon FOUND will be of more value than a sermon DELIVERED. Therefore if one is none too sure of any value more than mediocre in his bare moralizings, the dramatic alloy will give them more power for good, and it is the souls of his people the minister yearns to strengthen by all he has and is.

II

MINOR CHARACTERS

This book is fondly dedicated to the hope that its dramatized sermons will not so frequently be acted just as written, as that they will provide incitements to other preachers to write their own, somewhat after this general fashion. Ready-made garments of thought seldom fit well. And the glorious liturgic, standardizing words of the accepted formulæ

of worship are so far above our personal inventions that only they can demand that we leave them as they are and fill them full of our uplifted sincerities.

But the major characters of the Bible are too great for us to exploit them. We must leave them as they are, trying to learn their truth, not making them carry ours. With minor characters, however, we may be more free, because we do not know what were their particular truths: therefore we may utilize them for ours, to bring our truths into the presence of the transcendant ones of the major characters.

It is never wise to bring the figure of the Master upon the scene, and it is highly dangerous to put our words into His mouth.

Furthermore, if we are anxious to make our dramatized anecdotes an inducement to coöperative participation, the minor characters help on that plan, for minor characters are companionable, and they welcome us into the story, inviting us to put ourselves into their places. They let us "suppose," saying, "If I stood in the sandals of So-and-so, how would it seem?" Major characters keep us at arm's length by our awe for them; it is the less definite persons who but for the accidents of time and clime might easily be you or I.

III

THE SETTINGS

The equipment and settings of these incidents should be of the simplest. They should be pictorially satisfying, also. Indications are given for each dramatization.

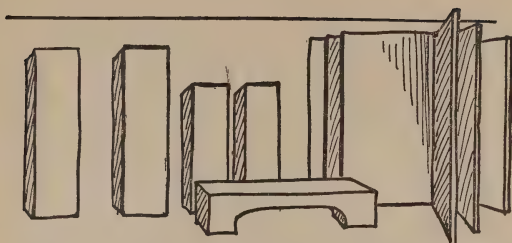
There are two plans, however, that provide adaptable schemes with equipment which will be, once built, available for many another play.

Of these the first is that of pylons ("pile-ons" they also are) and screens. The minimum number will probably be four pylons and two or three screens. The pylons are hollow plinths of wall-board and boards, at least one face being boards capable of bearing the weight of actors and the inner framework light but strong. Two of them should be four feet long, two six feet long. They should be the same transverse measure, perhaps eighteen inches. The screens had best be seven or eight feet high, with two wide leaves, at least four feet. If a bit of extra elaboration is desired a long pylon, eight feet long, with one surface hollowed to a shallow arch, will add very much to the adaptability of the set. These may be painted and repainted, or may be left with plain, neutral

or buff surface. The stones of a house wall may be indicated for use in all the incidents in this volume. Curtains should be added in certain of the arrangements. See the illustration for the set of pylons and screens and for suggested combinations.

The second suggestion is perhaps more churchly but less adaptable. Two uprights, with bases to hold them firmly erect, each upright carrying near its top a cross-arm. Across the cross-arms, back and front, will be hung poles. These poles should be from ten to twelve feet long, carrying curtains which will thus hang six or more feet apart. The front curtains should be of thinnest texture (pineapple cloth or theatrical gauze) and with full folds. The rear curtains should be opaque and of a rich neutral color. The uprights should be at least eight or nine feet high, and may well be capped with a proper finial ornament. They should be stained to match the church woodwork. The illustration shows variations of use for this dossal set.

If religious drama is to be undertaken it should not be equipped with makeshifts. It is worthy of a place before the altar or the congregation; it deserves dignified and adequate apparatus. Nothing will do more to validate



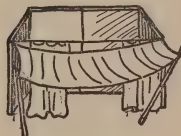
THE CENTURION OF CAPERNAUM

JOHN THE BAPTIZER



ZACCHAEUS

SIMON OF CYRENE

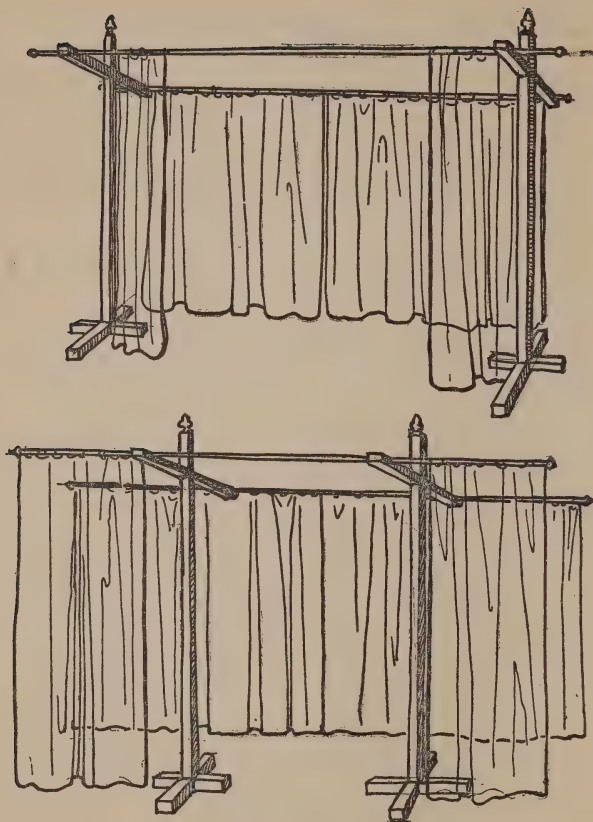


LAZARUS

MARY OF MAGDALA



PYLONS AND SCREENS



DOSSAL CURTAINS

religious drama than equipment which at once gives evidence how integral a part of church life it is taken to be.

With such equipment as is suggested these and other dramatic presentations will be dignified in the eyes of a congregation, whether produced in the parish house or in the church itself. The Gospel deserves our simple best. The presentation of its truth deserves our best care and evidenced loyalty. Its standards are honesty, beauty, simplicity, and symbolic rightness.

A DRAMA PROJECT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

I

It is not easy to find proper or significant church work for young people. Too frequently all we can think up for them are tag-end chores and fifth-wheel busynesses. The young people are not fooled. They well know whether their apparent activity is only "sound and fury, signifying nothing." They demand essential service. Unless the Church can and will call them to worthy service, they recognize no necessity for them in the Church's ménage and presently are found A. W. O. L. No artificial, trumped-up occupation-to-keep-them-out-of-mischief creates loyalty to the Cause. They must feel that their Church grants them essential functions and that it relies upon them to do just those things which they can best do, just those projects which, unless they carry them through, cannot be done so well by anyone

older or younger. Religious drama is an ideal assignment.

The dramatic urge is at its maximum with young people. They have romance, vigor, natural grace, self-confidence, and zest for self-expression. They are likewise instinctive team players. Older folk are self-conscious, their concept of drama has grown theatric, they "feel foolish" as actors; but the sight of earnest youth still melts them. Children, of course, are naïve and appealing, but their drama cannot be substantial. Young people are uniquely called to this specialty in Church life. The minister who is interested to bring truth to living utterance by dramatization will find his young people his Aaron and Hur to right and left of him. They will gladly become his living words. They will feel the awe of the preaching function. They will count themselves valuable to the Church in a dignified, specialized department. They will be contributing what no one else can do so well.

Could there be any occupation more educative than this commitment? By getting within a historic incident it becomes an experience. If whistling to keep up courage through the dark creates courage by the simulation of courage, what will living inside a rôle do to the soul of an

impressionable scholar? Do we not owe our young people this opportunity of educative imagination, which is also productive of loyalty because of its essentiality to the Church? Both ways the assignment is validated.

II

BETTER YET

The simpler sermon-substitute method utilizes the young people as the actors of a ready-made play. The minister has written the script, *his* sermon. He gives it to his junior partners to produce, overseeing its perfecting process, that these youths may utter his ideal as ideally as he, the preacher through them, can determine.

But there is an alternative to his writing his own script. Might it not be of even greater helpfulness to them if they were invited to produce the script? For instance, suppose the minister gives his Young Peoples' Fellowship or Bible class the chance to write the sermon as well as to act it. Will there not be a thorough assimilation of that story by each and all, to find out what is the verifiable experience they will find indicated in it? Will not the creative throes make its interpretation and comprehension more

sure? The preliminary stage of the script will be long and chaotic, perhaps, but the group experience will be the more unforgettable. Granted that this involves vastly more labor on the part of the leader, the spiritual result will be proportionate. The real reason why many a church worker either shrinks from or fails at religious drama is that he is too lazy! He does not demand of himself "the infinite capacity of taking pains" to reach artistic, technical, and moral clarity or finish. Drama is hard, hard work; but what dividends it yields! After all, the *raison d'être* of the Church or of any of its activities is the benefit of the flock, not the prestige of the shepherd or of the fold. The histrionic excellence of the ultimate acting is not as vital as the underlying educative experience of the participants which itself only gives moving power to that ultimate performance.

Therefore, once in a blue moon, let us audaciously venture into the field of group play-writing. Our young people will be eager to "grow their own" dramalets. And it will be good for their faith, and for their joy in the faith.

How, however, does one proceed?

III

BUILDING THE SMALL PLAY

"First catch your hare," says the legendary recipe for hare pie. First, then, catch the dramatic incident for the play. For the sermon-substitute this incident can be only a single one, and smaller than the usual one-act play would require. Nothing which requires seriatim episodes can be considered. The subject can be little more than that of an expanded tableau.

As an artist holds up his frame of cardboard, moving it near or far, right or left, over "all out-of-doors," before he determines which block of landscape shall make his picture, or as the snapshot-taker moves the finder of his camera until he has the right composition mirrored in its tiny oblong, so the class, having general vision of a whole field of interest, will move the episode-finder hither and yon until it centers upon the all-suggesting incident. Out of a favorite story a moment only can be chosen, but that moment must include the essentials of the whole tale, must pick out the quintessential significance of it all, must connote what goes before and after and must contain a climax of its own.

The subject for the play will probably be

xx A DRAMA PROJECT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

most stimulating if it is something "between the lines" of the original story. Fresh thought there must be, and the pulsation of fresh discovery. The whole tale will naturally have been studied until its local color, the character of its persons, the under-the-skin experience it represents and its natural development are felt, not merely known of. If the play is to catch attention and provoke thought it must have gone through the inverse process of catching attention and provoking thought with the writers: nothing more can be forthcoming from the play than went into its writing and acting. Unless there is somewhere in the process the exclamation, "Of course!" which accompanies the new comprehension that has dawned on some one, the ultimate play will not have any convicting power.

Any playsmith knows what is the *scène à faire* or obligatory scene. We are told that every novel or essay or book of argument is written for just one sentence somewhere in its pages. Find it and you know the book. Any long play heads up toward just one incident or situation or line. This scene good drama sense always puts in the open. If the hero is tightening his courage to declare his love for the will-o'-the-wisp heroine, we require that when the moment comes that he

swallows the lump in his throat and says, "Will you?" we may be allowed to eavesdrop. We want no curtain to sweep down as he enters her parlor, to ascend again only as he takes his hat to go; we demand the privilege of witnessing the moment of his test. Greek tragedy never plays the obligatory scene on-stage; it happens behind the scene and the Messenger comes to tell us of it in the past tense and second-hand. Greek drama could never satisfy us. The obligatory scene is for us rightly named; it will be an obligatory scene we choose for our sermonic playlet; nothing else will suffice. The group of young people will choose the essential incident by instinct. When the gist of the story is determined, when the clear purpose of the small drama-to-be is comprehended, the "*scène à faire*" will be self-evident.

But how far prior to that climactic moment shall we begin? And how far beyond that climax shall we continue?

Let a class member go to the blackboard and jot down in chronological sequence the items within the widest thinkable limits of the action. How many of these can be canceled out without impoverishment of the central situation? Which of them must be covered that the pivotal moment shall not be inexplicable? What antecedent

facts are needed for its color and tone? Can any of these apparently not-to-be-spared antecedents be woven into that subsequent situation?

It is poor art, too, baldly to explain preceding events. It would be preferable to write a program note or to prepare a few sentences of straight information to be spoken by some one outside the play than to have anything which paralleled the out-moded butler dusting the furniture as the curtain rises, and saying to the French maid, "Marster is late tonight. Me-thinks he is waylaid by his enemy, James Fitz-wallace, who is the second cousin of his father and who seeks the family jewels for himself." Events which have already taken place may easily be mentioned and in enlightening ways without diagrammatic exposition.

The incidents on the blackboard must each be examined. Some will never be missed; some must be woven into the later incident; some must be sacrificed; some must be saved for another play if they threaten diversion of interest because of their too great importance. Ruthless paring down helps unity. The final incident must say one thing only, and say it adequately. The text, "This one thing I do," may well be analogy for the kind of sermon on which we are working.

Some one has likened the beginning of the one-act play to swinging aboard a moving train at the last possible moment of its gathering momentum, and its ending to jumping off at the first moment when it will not surely be suicidal. With our project only a fifteen-minute incident, this simile is raised to the *n*th power of wisdom. Better leave many minor things to the imagination of the congregation than to have one moment of bald exposition or anticlimax. The beginning must be well past the real beginning, and the ending well before the real end. As soon as the remainder can be foreseen it is time to say no more. The *finis* should be unexpected; no slowing down should precede it. Perhaps only home-going thought will bring appreciation that, after all, everything was said and done which was structurally necessary to understanding. The play should leave the duty of realizations still upon the member of the congregation; it should not be too complete, compelling no cogitation. It must not say its sermon too flatly; the hearer must take up the task of thinking its significance through. Jesus ended His parables without explanations; He sent the crowd away to dig out His truth for themselves; He gave them a run-

ning start of new stimulus, then He said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"

IV

"Characters" they call those unique old men around the stove of the country store. "He's a character," we exclaim at some untrammelled modern Don Quixote. Whether or no this is unconscious criticism of that veneer of repression and mask of uniformity which breeding seems to demand of us, "characters" are surely those who have characteristic individuality. They have become their characters. They have kept their tang.

Impersonal persons deserve no place in a play. A list of participants is accurately labeled the list of "characters." The public is attracted by the flavor of the humanities. It rightly makes its bid for enriching experience in the realm of individualities. Lay figures with little more pungency to them than to a tailor's dummy create indifference or repulsion by their gangling insipidity.

Therefore, characters as such must furnish the stuff of which the play is compounded. A good plot very apparently eventuates from within, from character combinations. Indi-

viduals must have idiosyncrasies; the *dramatis personæ* are like chemical elements—put them together and an inevitable result follows.

As our co-authors complete the skeletal plot-sheet of the incident, with hints of its major speeches interspersed, they next undertake the definition of characters. Opposite the names of the persons necessary to the plot the amanuensis of the group writes down the list of qualities they are to bring to life. There will be an informal vote on the probabilities of characteristics, until the roster of characters is balanced and varied. There may be a tradition for the major persons of well-known classics such as the Gospels, but there will be all the more need for vivid and vitalizing imagination because of that very fact. The expected protagonists must show something better than was expected. They must have little humannesses and natural whimsies which stamp them as authentic. They must be alive, real, intimately actual, and inventive. They must be so individual that they will decide for themselves what they would be apt to say and do. They must be so personal that they can be trusted to develop both the incidental business and the speeches of the play on their own initiative.

v

In order to get away from monotony of diction and in order to give the scintillation of proper individualization it may next be helpful to assign parts. Having used due discretion to see that the leading characters are assigned to the most understanding youngsters and relying on the blackboard chart of individualities, the successive speeches may now be contributed by the creators of the various rôles, each one sponsor only for his own. The spokesman for every character will put himself into the place of his child of invention and will speak as he thinks that special protégé would probably speak. The plot-sheet will indicate the pattern of action and mood, which must be followed. It will likely be wiser not to have too much blue penciling until the whole play has been roughed out. Balance, proportion, emphasis, unity, and rhythm will be cared for by and by.

There will be some running fire of advice or criticism, of course. ("Oh, he wouldn't ever have shown that trait! It wasn't in his make-up!") "Now would the man Amos really have lost his temper so? You'd better read up on our chapter again and get the feel of his mental habits." Etc.) Yet this should not be

permitted to retard the rapid evolution of the incident. The blackboard will be out of the question now. Large sheets of paper will have taken its place on which each specializing author may scribble in turn with his black crayon. Pinned up on the wall or read through by the leader, the whole play-sketch is before them all. It will be too long, too amorphous, too uneven. Pruning and polishing are both due. The central incident takes on deeper implications, the question of enlisting the congregation's sympathies and admirations is faced, the interpretation of the theme must be increased in soundness. The minister should have his helpful, sermonic say just here, while the play is plastic yet substantial. This or that speech or action must be "slept on," reported back, and reshaped. Thus the play takes better and better form, through several meetings of the group.

The ideal arrangement would be for each member of the group not merely to grow his own rôle for the script, but for him to clothe and act the part also. Always with the group-experience as the inclusive impression upon each coöperator, that group-experience will have greater reality, and therefore educative effectiveness, if the single person lives with his own character of the play, clothes him as he feels

this visioned figure should be clothed, speaks his words as that embodied one would speak them. A fine adventure in selflessness, in sympathetic study of another, in the appreciation of difficult humanity! Good for the soul of the adventurer!

What minister will not find the execution of such a project as this a means of trust-educing for his young people. It will admittedly be much more onerous labor to guide it through and up to its objective, but how infinitely better it will be to take on this labor than to write out the script of a sermon-substitute alone in his study with only his own resources on which to draw. The minister himself will find his individualistic product less rich, less full-bodied, than the joint product of the alert, unconventional, sometimes amateurish, but always lively young thinkers who take his germinal idea and clothe it with their youth.

The experiment is at least worth trying. Once attempted, it vindicates itself.

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Note:

In the previous volume, "A Sinner Beloved and Other Plays," a play, "The Fears of Nicodemus," appears. This dialogue-play really belongs in this present volume and should be inserted between its sixth and seventh plays, if the complete sequence is to be imagined.

DESTINY

DESTINY

Belshazzar of Babylon Asks for a Revelation

THE SCENE

THE SETTING is a plain wall, indicated by a flat screen; with a Babylonian ornament across the top. Before it there is a square seat, ostensibly a plinth of marble. If further decoration is desired, two Babylonian standards with symbols of Marduk the Babylonian Sun God may be erected, one each side of the seat.

For the costumes accuracy of national type is requisite. Belshazzar is in a heavy scarlet robe, with long tasseled fringe diagonally about the skirts. He wears a gold and scarlet head-dress. He carries a massive spear or javelin. He is black-bearded, swarthy, and youthful.

The Soothsayer is in white, with a sacerdotal, horned mitre. He carries a smoking censer.

The Hebrews are each in a dull Palestinian

cloak over the gaberdine, and a sombre head-cloth.

C H A R A C T E R S

BELSHAZZAR, *Prince Regent of Babylon.*

THE CHIEF OF THE GUILD OF THE SOOTH-SAYERS.

THE UNKNOWN PROPHET.

A SCRIBE.

AN OLD, OLD HEBREW.

T H E I N C I D E N T

BELSHAZZAR *enters, striding angrily ahead of the flustered* CHIEF OF THE SOOTHSAYERS, *who follows him about with nervous steps.*

BELSHAZZAR:

It is unbearable! Babylon's doom is in the omens!

THE SOOTHSAYER:

Exalted One! Effulgent Lord! Prince Regent!

BELSHAZZAR:

Unless you can suggest something we can do more to change the omens, be silent and let me endeavor to think alone.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

When omens are obdurate, Prince Belshazzar, what can mere man do? What can

avail to alter the omen of the Solemn Conclave of the Gods in the Chamber of Destiny on the Kalends of the New Moon of the month Nisan?

BELSHAZZAR:

Has that devil-possessed Priest who stumbled yet been beheaded?

THE SOOTHSAYER:

He still lives. For the omens seem not to indicate he was at fault.

BELSHAZZAR (*turning on him*):

Not at fault? May Marduk strike me dead with his lightning if he was not at fault,—alone at fault!

THE SOOTHSAYER:

The oracle of the sacrifice shows it was some hostile fiend which was afraid to touch the idol of Marduk that loosened this unlucky man's sandal lacing and caused him to stumble.

BELSHAZZAR:

That stumble toppled the golden idol of Marduk on its nose, and Marduk is wroth at the indignity. That carrion priest must pay for it.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

Be merciful, Effulgent Lord! Pray think the second time and . . .

BELSHAZZAR:

Faugh! Falsehood! You paltry priests conspire always to agree. Forever you weave excuses for each other! Here on the Feast of Feasts, Babylon's New Year in the holy month Nisan, when the Ark of Babylon's protecting God Marduk has safely left his own Temple, followed by the Arks of all the gods and goddesses of all the towns and cities of the Kingdom brought hither for their duty at the Festival, when the procession of the gods has safely passed the full length of the Holy Avenue all the way from Bab-bel Tower to the Gate of Ishtar through the singing crowds and never a priestling missed step amid the knee-deep roses, when all was ready for the climax moment of Marduk's entry into The House of the New Year for the gods to sit in awesome conclave and determine the destiny of Babylon for all the year to come,—exactly at that horrific moment this catastrophic lout blundered on an untied sandal lacing and tumbled Marduk the Mighty prone in his Ark! And you dare excuse him by the lie that some roaming demon played the prank! That stumbling priestling shall pay for

this. For Babylon the Mighty is endangered. If Marduk is angry, all Babylon's days are gone and we bring our years to an end like a tale that is told. The doom of Babylon, I tell you, is in this day's oracle from yonder Conclave Room where irate Marduk sits this very hour!

THE SOOTHSAYER:

We can sacrifice to Marduk, praying Him to be forgiving! All through this hour when the Room of Council is closed and silent we can double incantations here without.

BELSHAZZAR:

No more vain protestations, Soothsayer! Doom is in this incident. I do not believe you have righted the insult to Marduk. What does Marduk care that you leaped to his aid, righting the idol at once, that you bade the choirs sing the louder and longer to cover confusion, that you set the statue on its throne there at the head of the altar-table of Conclave with extra deference, that you burned extra clouds of frankincense until we could not see Marduk nor any other God in the Council Room? What does all this avail if Marduk be angry? We have left the Council

of the Gods in its silent closed hall there; after the Hour of Silence we must bring in a victim to sacrifice before all those gods and read their horoscope for our year in its death. What victim are you bringing for atoning death? The victim should be that splay-footed priest; none less!

THE SOOTHSAYER:

But sire! No! No! Marduk does not ask human sacrifice except in gravest crises. And then he never asks the life of one who is a Babylonian. Least of all a holy priest.

BELSHAZZAR:

That priest shall die. On the altar in yonder hall. Before the assembled idols of all Babylonia. To save his nation. He must make atonement in his own person for the evil now impending. He must be propitiation to our God. Doom lowers over us. This is the Day of Destiny and Babylon is in jeopardy. It is expedient that this one man shall die rather than that the nation perish. I have spoken! (*He seats himself on the plinth of marble.*)

THE SOOTHSAYER (*kneeling to him*):

Exalted Prince of the House of Nabonidus, Chosen Son of Marduk! I feared

this word would issue from your lips. The Gods have warned me that my brother the priest would be demanded as the victim for this loathly accident to Marduk's triumphal car. And before you spoke the fateful word of condemnation I had acted. For I dread lest Babylon should incur even deeper doom by killing one so holy as the bearer of Marduk's Ark of Presence. I have already sent forth and caused to be haled hither a more proper living sacrifice for Marduk. May I speak of him?

BELSHAZZAR:

My mind is clear. I need no soothsayer to bewilder it with whining, specious pleas for one who is a member of his own beloved Guild. The priestling dies!

(THE MESSENGER *enters. He is dressed in Babylonian light armor, dust-be-grimed. He is taciturn and dignified. He bears a tablet, sealed with heavy seals.*)

THE MESSENGER (*holding his right hand high in salute*):

Belshazzar, Prince of Babylon!

BELSHAZZAR (*rising*):

Who are you that interrupts our privacy?

THE MESSENGER:

I was sent hither from the palace. The Chamberlain bade me hasten straight to you. I am a Messenger from the army of King Nabonidus in Akkad. I have a tablet for your eyes alone. From your father himself, the King!

(He kneels and presents the tablet. Belshazzar breaks the seal and reads. Silence falls.)

BELSHAZZAR:

Marduk is angry! Babylon is on the brink of ruin! Marduk and Ishtar save us!

BELSHAZZAR (*confronting the Soothsayer*):

Have your omens foreshadowed this word?
(He points to the tablet.)

THE SOOTHSAYER:

I know not what word you imply.

BELSHAZZAR:

Doom! Doom! Doom! Woe to Babylon!
Woe! Woe! *(He beats his breast.)*

THE SOOTHSAYER:

Prince Belshazzar, might I know what fearful news is in your tablet? That we may duly sacrifice to Marduk?

BELSHAZZAR (*volcanically*):

We shall all know soon enough. Cyrus has

conquered my Lord and Father at Sippar. Cyrus is across our boundary lines and victorious. The King of Persia, Conqueror of Lydia and Scythia, has his dagger at the throat of Babylon!

THE MESSENGER:

Is this message to be kept secret, sire?
Rumor runs fast.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

The omens! The toppled idol of Marduk!

BELSHAZZAR:

And I am in command here in Babylon.
What shall I do?

THE SOOTHSAYER:

We must at least sacrifice to Marduk and Ishtar. In the Conclave of the Gods, here and now!

BELSHAZZAR:

Then bring that accursed dog of a sorcerer you so protect.

THE MESSENGER:

May I be of service, Prince Belshazzar?

THE SOOTHSAYER:

Sire, I confess to you, this bearer of the God's great Ark is more to me than only a priest of Marduk. He is my son! Dearer to me than mine own life!

BELSHAZZAR:

Would not a father give his son to redeem his people?

THE SOOTHSAYER (*desperately*):

Nabonidus the royal father of Belshazzar the Prince Regent has long known of the victim I propose to substitute for this my son. In his kingly name I dare to bid you listen to the screed of charges 'gainst this other man who now, with two companions-in-chief in this offense, stands bound outside this anteroom. He is the chiefest offense in Babylon before the mighty Marduk, our Protector. For this abominable alien has lifted up his voice to sing a pæan of welcome to Cyrus of Persia into Babylon!

BELSHAZZAR:

Who is this man?

THE SOOTHSAYER (*things now running his way*):

A prophet of the Jews these many years exiled here among us. The voice of Hebrew traitorousness in our very midst.

BELSHAZZAR:

The Jews are peaceful for lo! these many, many years. They were well nigh loyal

Babylonians long ago. I doubt you, necromancer.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

Then put my claim to proof, sir. The Hour of Silence of the Conclave of the Gods is not yet over: we have some moments yet to wait. (*To the messenger*): Go forth into the room beside the gateway and bring me the three men you find there, bound and gagged. Make haste.

(*The Messenger goes.*)

THE SOOTHSAYER (*continuing*):

Little are you apparently aware of what your Hebrew subjects feel. Many there are, admittedly, who have become as Babylonians. Yet some there are who fiercely hold the hope of liberation and return to Jerusalem and lordship of the world by aid from highest Heaven. My spies are busy: I have known why Marduk's fury might arise and devastate us because of them. Such utterances as this are far too common (one of the spies reports this prophet said it to a great congregation gathered for worship of Jehovah). (*He reads from a scroll he takes from his girdle*): "Thus saith Jehovah, thy redeemer, I am the Lord that maketh all things, that

stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth forth the earth by myself, that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, that saith of Cyrus, He is My Shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure. Thus saith Jehovah to His anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, I will open before him the two leaved gates, I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight, I will break in pieces the gates of brass, I will give thee the hidden riches that thou mayest know that I, Jehovah, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. I am the Lord; there is no God beside me: I girded thee, O Cyrus, though thou hast not known me! Look unto me and be saved from captivity, all the ends of the earth: I am God; there is none else."

(THE MESSENGER *thrusts the three Hebrews into the room. One is an old, old man, with glittering, baleful eyes. He is stooped and infirm but his spirit is intense. The second is a scribe, erect and impeccable. He wears phylacteries. The third is THE UNKNOWN, majestic and modest, quiet but commanding. His*

face should somewhat but not too much suggest the Christ's.)

BELSHAZZAR (*sitting on the plinth of marble*):

Let them speak for themselves, Soothsayer.

THE SOOTHSAYER (*to the old man*):

Old Graybeard, you are summoned before Belshazzar the Prince. Make obeisance!

THE OLD MAN:

My back is bent in a continual obeisance, but not to such as Belshazzar. The burdens of grief and of bitterness bow me down: not reverence for the Gentile.

BELSHAZZAR:

Your age protects you from our anger, ancient. Otherwise you would be humbled with the scourge. (*To THE SOOTHSAYER*): Why is he here?

THE SOOTHSAYER:

He is the writer of hymns these rascally Hebrews sing in their assemblies. He fans the flame.

THE OLD MAN:

It is true I am hoary and feeble, Prince of Babylon. But my heart dwells even yet in Jerusalem. I am one of the very few

who once dwelt there and still live, in hateful exile. I have cause for undying hatred of Babylon.

BELSHAZZAR:

Were you cruelly treated?

THE OLD MAN:

Cruelly treated? Only that my home was burned, my girl wife outraged, my first-born babe dashed to death, my body worse than killed, my soul thrust into hell! Naught else!

THE SOOTHSAYER:

He long ago wrote a hymn of it! The wailing Jews sing it yet!

THE OLD MAN:

You shall have it; flung in your teeth, Babylonian! I am not afraid of death who have lived in living death for sixty years; wherefore I dare utter it even to you. (*He straightens a little; his hand beats time to his rhythmical, quavering chanting of the verses.*)

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song: and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the Songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's Song in a strange land?

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed: happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!

(He ceases, panting with vengeance.)

THE SOOTHSAYER (*sneering*):

Will Marduk delight to hear this?

BELSHAZZAR:

He is very old, and very pitiful. Would not you or I in his place feel as he does? Marduk will not be vindictive if such as I cannot be toward such as he is.

THE SOOTHSAYER (*pointing to THE SCRIBE*):

This man is a Scribe. He counts himself pure: he counts us unclean. Here in our

city he binds his folk fast to a Jerusalem-to-be by the Law of Holiness. They fast and pray and do magic, they build a Code of Perfection, they set up another authority than ours within our gates. They scorn our laws: their own Law is their all.

BELSHAZZAR (*to THE SCRIBE*):

Do you do this?

THE SCRIBE:

Our Law is our authority, Sire. It is all of statutes and judgments of righteousness. Jehovah gave it. Yet it makes of the Jews untroubling subjects of Babylon. Our hope is for restoration to Zion, but when or how that shall come is for Jehovah to say: meanwhile we only strive to deserve it in His holy sight.

BELSHAZZAR (*to THE SOOTHSAYER*):

If this is true, your priestling son may yet be the victim in yonder! (*He points to the Hall of Conclave.*)

THE SOOTHSAYER:

The Prophet is yet to be examined. Do not forget, Sire, the words in this scroll.

BELSHAZZAR (*rising and confronting THE UNKNOWN*):

Who are you?



THE SCRIBE AND THE PROPHET TRIED BY BELSHIAZZAR

THE UNKNOWN:

I am a servant of Jehovah. I am Israel.
All Israel is the Suffering Servant of God.

BELSHAZZAR:

You are mystical, prophet?

THE UNKNOWN:

You would not comprehend, I fear. These
my fellows do not.

BELSHAZZAR:

Deign to try me.

THE UNKNOWN:

Babylon has done Israel a great blessing.
Unwittingly. Babylon has shorn from us
all false ideals. Our destiny is not worldly
power, nor riches, nor dominance. I thank
Jehovah He has used Babylon to wrest the
true Israel from reliance upon them. All I
yearn is that Israel's being shall find its
work with the spirit of all the world. While
we seem forsaken of God and man we may
be most potent. Life can be imparted in
many a way the eye cannot trace.

BELSHAZZAR (*clasping his hand on his sword*):

This is the only power.

THE UNKNOWN:

The arm of God's kind of might is not re-
vealed to believers in brute strength.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

You would have us accept that the Omnipotent utters Himself through servile slave folk? Your Suffering Servant is incarnate defeat!

THE UNKNOWN (*arms wide-spread*):

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; he is wounded for our transgressions, he is bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace is upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

BELSHAZZAR:

Little comfort is there in such a philosophy!

THE UNKNOWN:

When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many. For he shall bear their iniquities.

THE SOOTHSAYER:

O Prince Belshazzar, live forever! Said I not that this man was the fit sacrifice to Marduk? If he so yearns to make his soul an offering for sin, a stone altar awaits

there before the Conclave of Destiny! Let the sin-bearer save our people!

BELSHAZZAR:

Perchance you are right. At least it will do no harm to give Marduk this alien prophet. (And he has prayed Cyrus over our borders!) (*He addresses THE UNKNOWN*) We will put your prophecy to its test. We need an atoning victim this hideous day of our impending doom; you have uncannily spoken such words as mark you out for that man. You believe in sin-bearing and life-giving? One stroke of yon Soothsayer's knife and you may discover the truth of your theory!

THE UNKNOWN (*slowly and bravely*):

Cut off out of the land of the living!

Brought as a lamb to the slaughter!

I am to die?

Not knowing why I am killed!

Prince of Babylon, I may not understand wherefore I am to perish, but you do not understand how the Lord God makes man's given soul a salvation even to his enemies.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways," saith the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than

your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

I shall not strive nor cry. I am not afraid. The Lord will divide His Servant a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death and made intercession for the transgressors.

(Somewhere outside, a gong is struck.)

THE SOOTHSAYER:

The Hour of Silence is finished.

The doors of the Chamber of Destiny open.

THE UNKNOWN:

Destiny! There can be none lovelier than to enter into God as He is! Into His redeeming Spirit! *(He points toward the Chamber.)* Mine hour is come. Lead on.

(THE SOOTHSAYER faces the Chamber, takes the UNKNOWN by the arm and leads him away. BELSHAZZAR starts to follow, but pauses meditatively. He muses to himself.)

BELSHAZZAR:

I have no heart for this hideous hour. Why am I thus soft of heart, of a sudden? . . . This man stirs my soul with strangest emo-

tion! What has he wrought in me? What HAS he wrought?

(He reluctantly follows THE UNKNOWN and THE SOOTHSAYER. Silence falls. After a moment the gong is softly struck.)

NOTE

Is it needless to say that this incident is entirely imaginary, except for the following items?

1. THE UNKNOWN PROPHET of the Exile lived at the end of the seventy years; he welcomed Cyrus on his horizon, but he himself never took part in the Return to Jerusalem.

2. The annual New Year Festival of Babylon was carried out as indicated here,—by the procession of the gods to the House of Conclave, where the destiny of Babylon was forecast for the ensuing year. It was in the month Nisan, the same month in which the Crucifixion later occurred.

3. Belshazzar was Prince Regent of Babylon, his father Nabonidus was in the field against Cyrus.

4. Cyrus entered Babylon without striking a blow. There was a strange lack of defense. Belshazzar did not fight.

5. Isaiah 53 is freely used. It is the center of the Unknown Prophet's noble preaching, the highest spiritual level of the Old Testament, the passage in which Jesus found a suggestion of the philosophy of His own Messiahship and the Cross. This incident is therefore placed as a prefatory one to all the other studies of His work and thought.

UNDER AUTHORITY

UNDER AUTHORITY

*The Centurion of Capernaum Begs the Elders of
That Town to Go for Him with a Message
to the Carpenter of Nazareth*

THE SCENE

A PORTION of whitewashed house-wall provides background. A doorway in it, opening indoors into a darkened room. The threshold is raised above the ground level two or three steps. A vine climbs the wall. Over the doorway an "S. P. Q. R." medallion. There is a bench against the house. In the doorway an ewer of water and a cup. A group of four Elders approaches the door. They are quietly dressed, in Oriental robes. Their faces are gentle and solemn. THE ROMAN CENTURION is in "undress uniform"—*i. e.* in a short tunic, bordered in gold; high, laced sandals; a sword-belt but no sword. His head is close-cropped and bound with a fillet. He wears heavy arm-lets of golden metal. His bearing is military.

THE CHARACTERS

ELDERS OF CAPERNAUM

THE LEADER

A GRAY-BEARD

A YOUNGER MAN

THE FOURTH

THE CENTURION

THE INCIDENT

The Elders Enter

THE LEADER:

Perhaps the boy sleeps. Do not knock.

A GRAY-BEARD:

Poor lad . . . and poor man! It is to be hoped the boy is not worse.

A YOUNGER MAN:

What a pity we cannot give the centurion relief by watching beside the boy's pallet while the troubled man snatches an hour of slumber. Sometimes I question this law of uncleanness which forbids us to cross the threshold of such a Gentile as he is.

THE FOURTH ELDER:

Peer in, but do not touch the door-post.

THE LEADER (*cautiously craning his head through the doorway and speaking gently*):

Gaius Martius! Sir Centurion! We are here. (*He speaks to his companions.*) He is yonder within, sitting by the lad's bedside, his face in his hands. The boy must be even more ill than he was.

THE GRAY-BEARD:

What will become of him if the child dies? Jehovah pity him, even if he is but a Gentile!

(*The CENTURION appears in the doorway. He is tense. The lines in his face are taut and grim. He shows by his manner toward these ELDERS that he is on friendly, even affectionate, footing with them.*)

THE CENTURION:

I am grateful that you should have come so soon at my urgent beseeching.

THE LEADER:

We owe you too much, friend, not to do what we are able when you are in need.

THE YOUNGER MAN:

Your emergency is no less than a compulsion on us. What can we do?

THE CENTURION:

The boy grows weaker. The fever burns him up. He cannot last.

THE LEADER:

We cannot pray to Jehovah for him; our faith seems to forbid. But we were in the synagogue, the synagogue you built for us, *thinking* deeply and compassionately toward God of the lad. No law forbids THAT!

THE FOURTH ELDER:

I bade two of your captains pray to their gods and offer a sacrifice for him. And I bought the sacrifice.

THE CENTURION (*smiling wanly*):

May Jehovah know a true prayer when it rises to Him! Whatever its form!

THE LEADER:

Here is a basket of grapes. They are cool with the dew. (*He sets it down.*)

(One of the ELDERS sits down on the bench by the door. They group irregularly. The CENTURION talks quietly with them, standing on the threshold and occasionally turning to look within the door to his right.)

THE GRAY-BEARD:

Neither our medicines nor yours seem to avail. Our physician is baffled; he has prescribed his best drugs—from afar.

THE CENTURION:

I have resolved to ask you whether or no you would go on an errand for me.

THE YOUNGER MAN:

At least I will go. And forthwith. Whither?

THE CENTURION:

My boy is dying—dying fast, under my very eyes. And he is all I have in the world. What think you of this young man Jesus from Nazareth? Is He a prophet? Could He heal my boy?

THE LEADER:

How much faith in Him have you, sir? All Capernaum knows well that the Baptizer bequeathed his work to Him. We hear that John spoke enigmatic words which seem to mean he recognized the Nazarene to be no less a person than “He-that-should-come,” the Fore-Runner Himself! But we are not yet convinced that a mere Carpenter from Nazareth can be the long-expected Bringer of the Kingdom. From the words of Simon and Andrew, sons of Jonas, and of John and James, the sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus received from the Baptizer, we learn enough deeply to impress us here. He is

indeed a Prophet of the One God. But final proof is wanting still. Do you wish us to go to Jesus on your behalf?

THE CENTURION:

A messenger of the Legion brings me the information He has headed north from Jordan's wilderness toward Nazareth. You could intercept Him by two hour's journey.

THE GRAY-BEARD:

It would involved the abrogation of our strictest Law to intercede for you, a Gentile. Nevertheless, I tell you frankly, albeit you are appointed here by Rome, the Mother of Oppressions, we find you noble, gentle, clean, and appealing. Would that all Romans were as you are! Charged with duties which elsewhere have brought hot-hearted hate to flame; handling the unclean task of gathering unclean taxes through the publicans; your closest friend that Levi who sits at his booth in the market place, avoided, spat upon, and cursed; exiled from your home and kindred on luckless soldier-duty in a land you must feel pestilential for its discomfort and for its alien culture—despite all this you so far win our sympathy I for one will go



THE SYMPATHY OF THE ELDERS

for you upon your errand. What more could I say, to demonstrate our gratitude to you?

THE CENTURION:

Elders of Capernaum, I thank your God for your courageous friendliness. You are human to me and I am grateful for it. Go for me to this same Jesus. My military means of information of Him provide me with reports which hearten me concerning His generosity of spirit and of grace. My heart tells me He will not turn a deaf ear to my plea, if you will carry it. And perhaps,—who knows?—He may be able to send His potency across the miles to this . . . my boy!

THE LEADER:

What shall we tell the Carpenter of you?

THE CENTURION (*stepping down to the ground level*):

You need no instructions. You know my plight. Here am I, a patrician of eternal Rome. The army was my father's profession and his pride. My father's father's, too. You know that my belief in heathen gods which are no gods has long since flickered out. You know my scorn for gods of Rome or any other peoples which

are so base they forfeit the respect of any decent, high-souled gentleman. Naught are they but the symbols of ideas and passions men already have. I watch my soldiers reel home from the wineshops singing songs to Bacchus. Can Mercury the sheep-stealer command, "Thou shalt not steal"? My gods are dead, and I have naught on which to stand save quicksand doubts. Discipline and authority are my only hope.

THE YOUNGER MAN:

I think it was your haunted eyes and starving heart which brought us first of all to sympathy. We perceived the puzzled wonder with which you watched our faith. Half humorously and half wistfully you studied us. We know in Pharisee and Scribe and Sadducee you find some whims at which inscrutably you smile. We know that you will never turn to Judaism, And yet—you built our holy synagogue! Whene'er we enter it and feel its beauty we wish that we might even pray for you therein!

THE CENTURION:

If need be, tell this Jesus I have acknowledged Jehovah is a God, although He is

not mine. He is righteous, disciplinary, clean, and just! I am not faithless. Tell Him that sitting here in my bare home (a soldier's campaign tent of whitewashed stone) I read the scrolls of Stoic and Cynic philosophers and strive to compound from logic and experience some creed which gives me basis for deduction of the Unknown. It is a fragile, fragmentary faith I have, which is all my lonely own. But now, beside my pallet on which my son lies gasping for his life, I have wrestled like Jacob with the angel and am prepared to risk it for a blessing. Therefore I ask you to go for me to Jesus.

THE LEADER:

How shall we phrase your plea?

THE CENTURION (*rising and pacing to and fro*):

I do not whine. Give Him no impression I am a craven. Do not make me out pathetic. I hope I have preserved some shred of dignity and self-respect. Even in your eyes, my well-poised friends. And yet I think it only fair that he should know how much I care for this my son. Tell Jesus I am alone except for him. My wife gave him her life in childbirth. You

have witnessed what a happy, eager lad he is, my constant shadow and my comrade. With intense and silent love we grow to be all in all each to the other. How can it be otherwise? Since the boy cannot join the games your children play, but must stay the leper's paces isolated from their fun, he grows to be a wistful, eager little man with adult mind. He is my fellow exile, my body guard and ministrant, my lover and my life. Without comfort even from such convictions as your own which promise a millennium at hand for God's own chosen and knit you into one great family by the Covenant. He is my only strength. My only Covenant. My only future. (*He breaks down.*)

THE YOUNGER MAN:

Good friend, have no fears that we will fail to paint the picture of your travail.

THE FOURTH ELDER:

Centurion, we strain our Law to go and plead for you, uncircumcized and uncovenanted Gentile that you are, because our hearts go out to you and we defy the Law to hold us from compassion.

THE LEADER:

The rumors of this Jesus report Him to be

most free of the Law's trammelings. I am moved by hope that He will also work for us the fulfilment of our desire. Perhaps He will say we are not doing wrong to care for you, to pray for you with all but words, to yearn for your peace. If only He should show that such compassion is not anathema! He does not seem to withdraw His soul from outcast and unclean; He can do for us what we dare not do ourselves. If He will boldly pray our prayer; if He will freely overstride the limitations of the Code and fuse our longings with His gift to you—then He will have blest us in His blessing you! Will He provide the freedom which our hearts are yearning for even now?

THE CENTURION (*standing*):

At least tell the Carpenter these very words. Pray learn them as I say them, for they are my creed and prayer. Say for me, "I AM NOT WORTHY THAT YOU SHOULD COME UNDER MY ROOF; WHEREFORE NEITHER DID I THINK MYSELF WORTHY TO COME TO YOU. SAY THE WORD ONLY AND MY BOY SHALL BE HEALED."

THE YOUNGER MAN:

You undervalue your merits.

THE CENTURION (*disregarding the praise*):

My neighbors, hearken, Spirit is the only reality. It goes where love carries it. Love is self-impartation. Its power is that of the life which is given. Your affection for me has not been fettered by your qualms of the Law. You have not thought you let yourself pass beyond its walls? Oh, but your lives have touched mine, nevertheless. Therefore say to the Nazarene, further, "SAY THE WORD ONLY AND MY BOY SHALL BE HEALED. FOR I AM A MAN SET UNDER AUTHORITY AND I HAVE SOLDIERS UNDER ME. I AM HERE BECAUSE I WAS SENT HERE TO REPRESENT THOSE OVER ME. WHEN I SAY, 'GO!' TO ONE OF MY SOLDIERS, HE GOES FOR ME. WHEN I SAY, 'COME!' HE COMES. I SAY TO MY BOY, 'DO THIS,' AND HE DOES IT FOR ME. SEND YOUR WORD, MASTER, AND MY LAD SHALL BE HEALED. YOUR WORD IS WITH THE AUTHORITY OF YOURSELF; IT CARRIES YOUR WILL AND YOUR POWER."

THE YOUNGER MAN:

This is the reality of prayer?

THE LEADER (*to himself*):

Jehovah aid our plea to the Nazarene!
Can He . . . WILL He pray for the Cen-

turion's lad? Will He send His spirit hither?

THE CENTURION:

My faith is perhaps not so great as He finds in Israel. But it is my own. Be it done unto my son at least according to its sincerity!

THE LEADER:

Amen and Amen!

THE OTHERS:

Amen and Amen!

(They salute the CENTURION and turn away. The YOUNGER MAN hesitates, turns back, and embraces the Roman! They depart. The CENTURION turns to his doorway, raises his hands toward Heaven, and stands silent a moment. Then, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes, he pours a cup of water and steps within toward the unseen sick-bed wherein lies his son.)

REJECTED OF NAZARETH

REJECTED OF NAZARETH

*The Keeper of the Nazareth Synagogue, Sitting in
the Coolness of the Synagogue, Tells of the
Expulsion of the Village Carpenter*

(A Monologue)

THE SCENE

THE KEEPER of the Synagogue is a black-bearded middle-aged man, clothed in a white garment like a cassock. Over his shoulders is a prayer-shawl. On his head he wears a mitre-like head-dress of linen, topped by a flat disk. He is sandaled. A phylactery on his forehead and right hand. He enters the chancel and seats himself cross-legged on a draped bench, which is at the front. He carries a typical scroll, the parchment wound on two gilded rollers with handles and covered with a red cloth covering, with gold arabesques to embellish its beauty. The covering is tied on to the scroll.

If desired, the seat for the Synagogue-Keeper may be backed with a tall screen. And on either side may be a seven-branched candelabrum.

THE KEEPER OF THE NAZARETH
SYNAGOGUE SPEAKS:

(He speaks intimately to the congregation, as if he had only one or two close friends near him. He should give the impression of confidential frankness to a trusted friend. The congregation should be made to feel the implications of Nazarene temperament to be somewhat its own. He emphasizes the word "comfortable" and its synonyms with half-humorous affection. The Keeper speaks fluently, with many Hebraic but unexaggerated gestures. He points to features of the church building as if it were actually his synagogue.)

This old synagogue is a comfortable place. Comfortable as a nest. It is my nest, you see. I haven't stepped outside it for a week; somehow I keep busy just puttering and pothering around. I like this cool, musty, shadowed room, with its worn pillars and its chipped furniture and its curtained ark. *(He points.)* I like to go up to the roof at sunset time and sit by the hour, watching the sky grow dark, and the hills grow faint and the lights in the town down be-

low me come out, burn and quench. Yes, I do like to be comfortable. I'm like all Nazareth; Nazareth likes to be routine, unruffled, undisturbed, content.

Oh yes, I manage to keep comfortably busy. Candlesticks to keep replenished, carpets to shake out, the ram's horn to be blown at prayer time, people to gossip with as they stop by, the scrolls to arrange after every service. Why, only today I spent a good two hours patching the embroidered cover of the Leviticus Scroll. (*He undoes the cover.*) Queer how that cover wears out so fast; the covers of these Prophet-Scrolls never seem to need such attention. In fact, just between ourselves, I sometime wonder why we fuss along with the prophets, anyway—almost nobody reads them, and nobody lives by them. The Law is the definite and the comfortable stand-by. Plainly and ready-made, it tells what to do. Those prophets must have been uncomfortable chaps to live with, disturbing peaceful routine and stirring up people to dangerous thinking. There have been no prophets for three hundred years—that's one of Jehovah's blessings to us! Perhaps we ought secretly to confess to each other that most people really don't want their theories to come true in life. It is so much more comfortable to let

our theories remain sentimental emotion! Religion would be very disturbing indeed if we took it to demand practical and thorough-going application. (*He sighs.*) That young man Jesus was near enough to a prophet for us to realize how uncomfortable a real one would be. Thankful we are he went to Capernaum! (*He says the name scornfully.*) Nazareth had had enough of his persistent ferment. Capernaum can have him and welcome! (*He leans forward.*)

Nazareth isn't like Capernaum. We're up here in a cradle of the hills, off the main road, and quiet. Capernaum is bustling and uncomfortable. It's on the main road and prides itself on the stir of the new ideas the caravans bring in along with their bales of goods. Capernaum preens itself because it belongs to the big world; because it's broad-minded. Bah! Give me the easy-going sleepiness of Nazareth where I can be contented and undisturbed; doing things as my fathers did them, thinking their thoughts, obeying their rules and letting the Scribes tell us what to accept and obey. What a relief it is to have the turmoil over and done with which that mad young carpenter stirred up, so we can be comfortable again. He was certainly the most inconvenient and bother-

some fellow Nazareth has known in my day. Always asking the most innocent-sounding questions, with his white teeth flashing under his hood in his genial smile. But when you stopped to think where his question would carry you, you found it was pointed straight against some tradition or custom that came down to us from the Law of Moses (the Lord be blessed for the Law!) and that if you let yourself think, it would land you in upset ideas! As I said, I'm glad he's gone. (*Grudgingly*) Oh, I liked him. He had a way with him and he won your heart while he was with you, but when he was gone and you shook yourself out of his spell you gasped at the audacity of the notions with which you'd almost let yourself agree for the minute. If he had stayed any longer we'd have had trouble in our pious village. I miss him, but he was uncomfortable.

When he was here in the village I confess I used to stroll down that crooked lane to his carpenter shop perhaps once or twice a week. He sort o' fascinated me. I know now it was an allurements of Satan; the Scribes say the Sanhedrin has declared he is possessed by the power of Beelzebub. (Jehovah protect us from the Evil Eye!) Yet I did like to hear him talk. With the day's work done and the cedar shav-

ings pungent-smelling around our ankles and the children going to sleep against his knees, how he'd talk and make us think! He wasn't brilliant, if by brilliancy you mean glittering, clever vainglory. Oh no! He somehow just seemed to put into words a lot of dreams and longings for which we ordinary folk never find words or are afraid to give their head. I shiver when I realize how near to the edge of a precipice I wandered; a little more and he would have had me (me, the Keeper of the Nazareth Synagogue!) questioning the kind of a God for Whom the Fathers have spoken! He would have had me dissatisfied with the ceremonial Law of the Pharisees. Why, do you know, up there in his shop I once almost put my arm around the shoulders of that Zecharias ben Issachar, whom everybody knows to be our most rebellious sinner. He hasn't worn a phylactery for two years and he boasts he once broke bread with a Samaritan! And I touched him!

Jesus loved the prophets. He gloried in their harangues. I never could see anything in the moonings of this last Scroll of Isaiah (*he indicates the scroll he holds*), but again and again he used to come up here to the Synagogue and ask me for it. He'd sit by the hour over there beside that pillar where the light falls, with

this scroll spread out on his knees (*he unrolls it a bit*), looking off into space and his lips moving now and again as if in prayer. When he'd take part in the Sabbath meeting I never had to ask him what scroll he wanted out of the Ark. I would always reach in behind its curtains and bring it to him as he went up on to the reading platform, and he'd smile with appreciation as if I'd done something wondrous for him, so to read his mind.

We Nazarenes are sorry for his brothers and sisters. As Joses said to me last time he came past and I quizzed him a bit, they've been in terror that the authorities would pounce on them all for Jesus' dangerous audacities. Or at least that their house might be branded unclean because of his contacts with sinners. They loved him and they feared him and they disagreed with him and they almost hated him; all at once. I can excuse them: they didn't want their peace wrecked and their carpenter shop useless. I think they were charitable when they said he was really beside himself and wanted to put him away, to protect him against himself.

Even the Widow Mary has had a hurt, wondering look in her loving eyes. I'm afraid she's partly to blame: she has mystical notions about

God's power and about the Kingdom. Got them out of Isaiah, too, just as Jesus did. (*He indicates the scroll.*) Used to hint her boy was going to be a Somebody for the Lord God Almighty. (May Jehovah keep us humble!) But Jesus evidently hasn't developed along the lines she hoped. Her love of him almost hurt you, it was so still and so intense and so rapt; but you could see, however tender he was of her and the youngsters, he wasn't just what she'd hoped. No wonder he said a prophet isn't without honor except in his own home town and family. Only it seems presumptuous for a village carpenter to talk about prophets as if he implied something personal. (*He rises*)

Then came John the Baptizer down in the Wilderness. THERE was an uncomfortable chap if there ever was one. HE was a rebel. Talking to good respectable pillars of society and telling them they needed baptism! Baptism, which we orthodox keep for lepers and Gentiles! Are WE unclean? John preached so. Said our pride and our smug complacency and our certainty that we know the whole truth made us unclean in Jehovah's sight! Tried to shake us out of our certainty that because we are Sons of Abraham the Kingdom belongs to us. I had no patience with the mob that milled down

into the dust and heat of the wilderness to get hysterics over his sensationalism. From Heaven or of men? What a question! I could have told you at the outset John was no prophet; he wasn't respectful to the sanctities. He was uncomfortable!

Jesus went down there with that rabble. I don't know exactly what happened there, for I stayed here in Nazareth to keep the synagogue running smoothly. I gather, however, that John baptized him, singling him out as his successor, greater than he! Picking him out to usher in the Kingdom, if you please! A carpenter from Nazareth, starting a millennium! If the idea were not so bumptious it would be comic!

But he took it seriously,—Jesus did. After Herod marched John off to the dungeon, Jesus took up the message where John stopped. Talked gently of work for Jehovah. Announced that he spoke for God!

Over in Capernaum, if you please, the Capernaum hatched story goes that he healed the Roman centurion's boy, and at a distance. In Capernaum, mind you; not in Nazareth. He did no miracles *HERE* where we know him; no, sir!

You've heard of the final break? The last straw on the camel's back? He came home. Slipped in quietly; greeted all his friends with dignified affection and sat by the hour with his mother. I saw him up on the hill back of town, kneeling silently long past sunset, alone. When he walked through the village the buzz of angry gossip rose all around him. Trouble was coming. So was the Sabbath. Everybody was hostile. He COULDN'T be anything but a peasant carpenter to us; we know him from birth. He COULDN'T be a prophet. If he'd set out to be a Scribe or a Pharisee and gone to the Temple School, we might have listened. He'd only been to a tempestuous fanatic out in the wilderness and here he came back to us claiming to be accredited from on High! I confess I can get angrier now than I could when he looked into my eyes and smiled; THEN my heart stopped beating and I was not myself. We HAD to break his spell. Now I know it was the wile of Satan, to make him so winsome. He surely had a way with him!

Came Sabbath morning. The synagogue was packed. Every Nazarene was tense. As I looked down from the platform here into the faces of my friends, I hardly knew them, they

were so stirred. They were distressed and uncomfortable. They were trying to keep their minds cold, trying to steel themselves against his smile and his voice. When he rose to read the last lesson from the prophets he turned to me and held out his hand. My throat was so dry it ached, but I handed him this Isaiah Scroll I knew he'd want. (*He acts it out.*) His eyes were shining and his face was somehow aglow with an exaltation I've never matched.

You've heard what happened. (*He goes to the lectern and spreads out the scroll.*) His voice even and thrilling with gladness, he read his verses. (*He reads*) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Amid a silence that was agonizing, he let the Scroll snap itself closed (*he lets the Scroll roll up*) and sat down to speak. There were dozens of us who loved him just that moment, albeit in the back of the mind we knew we were fools for it.

(*He points to the empty seat, as if the Master were there.*)

"This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your

ears," he began. As he spoke we began almost to wonder if it could be so. He didn't seem like a village carpenter. A ray of sunshine fell slantwise down through yonder grating on his white kerchief and I swear it haloed his head with a nimbus. I gasped. I watched him through a mist. The jaw of many a cynical elder dropped with awe as at an apparition. We hardly knew what he said; his voice was like the ripple of the brook, his eyes like its brown-bottomed pools in the shade, his hands for grace like the gulls on Galilee. We were caught in an ecstasy of emotion far above and beyond cold thought. For just a moment we were ready to take his word to our hearts. For just a moment we felt a strange throbbing of wistfulness for the unknown.

Next, we shook ourselves back into common sense. With all the effort of recollecting ourselves we stiffened our backbones. I could see the grimness come back into those faces about him. I could perceive the old self reassert itself. A muttering like faintest thunder behind Mount Hermon reached my ears—and his. He knew! The still gladness of his face turned to longing. The sun ray went out. He leaned forward and his voice mounted (Oh, he was

courageous!) as he said: "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb: Physician, heal thyself; whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here. Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country."

He had said it! A prophet! The charm was ended; the power of his person was snapped. (*Excitedly and vividly acting it.*) With a yell of rage the whole congregation leaped at him. The recoil of our nerves was complete. To this day I remember the upraised, clutching hands that reached for him to drag him down. (*He shows.*) We realized it was BLASPHEMY he had uttered! Instinctively we rushed for stones to hurl. We Nazarenes boiled out into the sunlight. (*He points to the main door.*) Shouting vituperations—"Hurl him over the cliff!" "Stone him!" "We disown him!" "A Prophet!" "Jehovah cleanse us from the blasphemer!" The shouting was as the quarreling roar and snarl of Herod's lions must be when he prods them with his trident. It was blood-lust.

(*Hushed.*) Suddenly that crowd opened. An awesome silence clove into the babel. Right through a path down the midst of that mob walked Jesus. None raised a hand. Our imprecations caught in our throats. We dropped

our stones. He looked us silently in the eyes. His cheeks were wet with slow tears. His steps were calm and unhurried. The spell was on us again. We could do nothing. He held us motionless.

Thus he passed through and beyond us. He never looked back. Until he was over the brow of the hill we never stirred. He was gone!

I have never seen him again. Rumors drift to us from Capernaum and all Galilee that crowds are following him, that his teachings and healings spread his spell. We hear, too, that he has dared to defy the Pharisees, that he has touched a leper, that he called a publican to be one of his disciples, that he has broken the holy Sabbath, that he has insanely presumed to pronounce the forgiveness of sins which belongs only to the power of Jehovah Himself! If that man had had his way with us he would have made our hearts ache with grief of those on whom the Law bids us turn our backs. He would have led us into the blasphemous presumption THAT MAN CAN KNOW AND SHARE GOD'S OWN LIFE! Anathema on him! We know enough! We are more comfortable not to ask too much of ourselves! We disown Him!

But oh! he was winsome!

*(He starts to go.. Just before his exit
he pauses longingly to add):*

If . . . he . . . only . . . could . . . have
. . . been . . . a . . . Pharisee!

IN HEROD'S DUNGEON

IN HEROD'S DUNGEON

*Two Disciples of John the Baptizer Return to John
in Prison with an Answer to a Question Sent by
Them to Jesus, Now in Galilee*

THE SCENE

THE TABLEAU setting shows only a crude but impregnable iron gate or door, set in a rough stone doorway. Through it only midnight blackness shows. The Baptist is not visible at all, although the rattle of his fetters is once heard, and, once, his faint voice. The Two Disciples are clad in simplest Oriental clothes, obviously patched and impoverished. The Guardsman wears a plain helmet and a leathern jerkin; he is not a Roman legionary.

THE INCIDENT

*The DISCIPLES hasten to the dungeon gate.
If preferred, one of the DISCIPLES may do all*

the talking; but there will be more variety and action if both participate in the story.

THE FIRST DISCIPLE:

John! Oh, John ben Zacharias! (*He pauses and listens.*)

THE SECOND DISCIPLE (*peering through the grill*):

Master! Master! . . . John!!

(*There is a faint moan at last for answer. Fetters clink in the darkness.*)

THE FIRST:

Jehovah be blessed, Good Master, now you make answer! We were frightened for a moment. For we could not see you in the murky darkness of this pestilential dungeon. The silence terrified us. Even the clinking of your fetters was a welcome sound at last.

THE SECOND:

We could not but go cold in fear that Herod, up yonder, had done away with you while we were on our journey for you. The fantastic, momentary thought was bound to come that Herod might order that we be admitted; that he might clap to the gate behind us, laughing sardonically at our anguish. (*He pauses. The fetters clink.*)

Although you and we do daily face the possibility of your execution, yet we hastened breakneck to and from the Nazarene in desperate hope that we might bring you your longed-for answer while yet you were alive.

THE FIRST (*laughing sardonically*):

Yet Herod fears you, Master. Does he dare to kill you, after all? He keeps you thus alive and lets us go and come, that he may have you brought forth to preach to him! His fascination by you is like biting on an aching tooth for luxury of pain: he feels your mastery of him. You are no prisoner of his. He is your prisoner and he knows it. (*The fetters stir.*)

THE SECOND:

You are eager for our message, Master?

THE FIRST:

Straightway we tell you it is comforting.

THE SECOND:

Our own certainty is laid at your chained feet, with loving yearning that it may avail.

THE FIRST:

Have you now the patience to hear our tale complete? Pull yourself closer to this grating if you can. (Would we could

reach you and bring you to comfort or to freedom for your body!)

THE SECOND:

The veriest slave in the castle overhead is granted light and warmth and cleanness. Why not you, the prophet?

THE FIRST:

Here's our venture, then, for you. Three days we took to cross the miles to the village of Capernaum. We took the Jordan Valley road, which passes, beloved Master, as you full well know, within eye-shot of the very springs where once the multitude came thronging to listen, with bated breath and smitten hearts, to one who cried there in the wilderness that the Kingdom is at hand—where the crowd came to *you* for the baptism of repentance,—where *you* pointed out the Nazarene as the Coming One, Forerunner of the Messiah from the Highest Heaven. We stood and listened for your voice, our leader, and as we stood there it thundered direfully beyond the hills, and portents seemed about us.

THE SECOND:

Almost we returned to you straightway, pulled by our heartstrings to you who are our Prophet and our Master still.

THE FIRST:

The second day at nightfall we reached a crowded inn. In its courtyard we found a corner to spread our ragged rug and hang our tattered tent. When gluttonous men and beasts were fed, when the dainty aristocrats in the upper rooms could think of no more orders, we simple folk sat down beside the welcome fire amid the kneeling camels and the heaped bales from off their backs.

Fate sent us fortune, Master. A pompous servant, pluming and preening himself because his master was important, began to patronize our lowliness. He airily let fall that his master yonder was no less a personage than an apostle from the Sanhedrin, sent by certain Pharisees of Jerusalem to seek and watch and to report on Jesus, in Capernaum.

THE SECOND (*acting out the scene of which he tells and aping the servant's arrogance*):

No need was there to lead him on. He ached to talk, to show how orthodox and notable he was, in association with this Pharisee of Pharisees who traveled forth to spy and tattle of the One you designated as Jehovah's own. His lofty speech

betrayed him and his masters. Despite his arrogance he showed plainly that the Scribes and the Pharisees are puzzled, baffled, worried!

THE FIRST:

Jesus is too great for them; as you, Master, are for Herod. The multitudes are asking, "By what authority does this man these things? Whom does He believe Himself to be?" They all admit His charm, His power, His eloquence, His miracles, His courage. Everywhere He goes men's hearts are greatly stirred.

THE SECOND:

And yet the Pharisees and Scribes are scandalized at Him. You should have seen the uplifted eyebrows of this posing servant as he recounted what fearful iniquities the Nazarene has done. Apparently His central evilness is that He has followed to the full the dictates of sheer humanness. Even in your dungeon darkness, you, O John the Baptizer, will surely smile that He has done such baleful things as make a man whole on the Sabbath, touch a leper, be friendly with publicans, sinners, and outcasts! You, who preached that mental cocksureness

is pride, and that pride is unclean—you will grimly smile that Jesus thus carries forward your championship of the true Israel of Spirit.

But, runs the rumor, worst of all, He has startled all Galilee with His claim of the right to forgive sins. We confess this assumption staggers even us; for it is somehow in our blood that only God can forgive sins—if He will. It is Jehovah's own function, not man's. Yet Jesus says man can and should forgive sins. The Pharisees are white with anger at what they call blasphemy. Is this Carpenter making himself the Almighty?

THE FIRST (*rising and standing by the door-jamb, dreamily looking out into space*):

Until we saw Jesus at Capernaum, we were dazed and weak at the thought. After that — But let us tell you, that you may judge for yourself whether this spiritual giant is indeed "He-that-should-come," the Forerunner. The night we arrived, the town was buzzing with excitement. Jesus had but recently come back to Peter's home, and that morning had been teaching in the courtyard of his house. We gathered that He was speak-

ing of the coming of the Kingdom. (You, Master, have taught us that the true Israel of sincerity and humanity and spirituality shall obtain the Kingdom, but you have never implied that the Kingdom is aught save a new Jerusalem actually to replace the old, built in Heaven and brought from the skies by the Messiah. Jesus says the Kingdom is a change in the quality of inner life, that our hearts and minds shall be leavened by it, until outer conditions have no effect on it. He trusts love for power which ties the true Israel into unity, the unity of the Kingdom.)

As he taught in Peter's house, the crowd was so dense every door was blocked. Suddenly four men on the roof above us let down an impotent man on a mattress through a hole they had clawed through the rubble. There he lay in front of Jesus, and the Apostle of the Sanhedrin was in a window close by, looking on. We were in the crowd, near enough to see Jesus look into the man's eyes. His face yearned over that huddled fellow on his pallet; you could feel His life reach out and lay hold of him. He said, and we heard Him, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." And the man

braced himself, drawn by Jesus' eyes, and slowly arose! You should have heard the gasp of awe and then the silence. The Apostle leaned out and angrily expostulated, "Only God has the power to forgive sins!" Jesus smiled at him and said, "If you prefer that I should use the words, 'Rise up and walk,' I will. Words matter little either way; the reality is the same." We were there: we could feel the tingle of His power; we could not wonder that the man's life got what flowed forth from Jesus, that it lifted him to new strength. Anyone there who was willing to let himself perceive what Jesus really did, knows that He imparted something of Himself and that He travailed to do it, and that this is what He meant by forgiveness. We were there and we know!

THE SECOND (*breaking in*):

The crowd broke up. Through to the Nazarene we elbowed. He looked up, recognized old friends with His wholehearted smile, put an arm around each of us and pulled us through a doorway into privacy. With our hearts in our mouths, we put your question for you. "Art thou He-that-should-come or look we for another?"

He stood for a moment, and His wistful eyes filled with tears as He looked off into space.

THE FIRST:

Oh, but He loves and honors you, Master! Never a reproach did He utter. He seemed to understand why you must wonder whether you have staked your whole being on a true or false intuition; He seemed to see that He was indeed different than you had expected, and that His kind of Kingdom was new to you. He understood—of that we were vividly conscious. Slowly and tenderly He said to us: “Go and show John those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the tidings proclaimed to them.” You know these words. They are from the prophecy of the coming of the Kingdom. But as He said them, they were plainly not to be interpreted merely of physical need. There are spiritually blind and spiritually lame, moral lepers and morally deaf; there are spiritually dead to be quickened; the poor are the poor in spirit. And by love, which is

compassion — forgiveness — He surely works his works of the spirit.

Whereafter He added: "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

Oh, Master, can that mean you?

THE SECOND:

Judge for yourself, is He the Forerunner, the bringer of God's Kingdom? He is better than we foresaw. His kingdom is that for which our hearts hunger.

THE FIRST (*ecstatically but quietly*):

If He is not what we expected, He is greater. His divineness is of compassion, and on compassion, forgiveness, we had not counted! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

You were right, John! You were right! Your life is not thrown away. You have made straight in the arid desert of meaninglessness a highway for our God! He that SHOULD come HAS come! His name is Jesus—Redeemer!

THE SECOND (*clutching the cloak of the FIRST*):

Hark! (*He pauses.*) The footsteps of a guardsman!

(*The GUARDSMAN enters. Disdainfully he waves the Disciples aside.*)

THE GUARDSMAN:

Get you gone, vermin!

(They pause.)

THE SECOND:

Must we go?

THE GUARDSMAN:

My Lord Herod sends for John to come
join his orgy.

(He gestures upward, contemptuously.)

THE FIRST:

Wherefore?

*(The GUARDSMAN indifferently starts to
unlock the door, disdaining to answer.)*

THE FIRST:

You will not say?

THE SECOND *(kneeling at the iron grille)*:

Good night, dear Master. Give us your
blessing.

THE FIRST *(kneeling beside him)*:

Tell us we have fulfilled our duty to you;
say you are not offended in the Nazarene.

*(They listen intently. Then they leap
to their feet, radiant.)*

THE SECOND:

He calls you blessed, therefore!

THE FIRST *(tenderly: hands through the grat-
ing as far as he can reach)*:

Jehovah grant you peace!

(The GUARDSMAN turns threateningly. They reluctantly move away. As they go, the FIRST, looking outside, shudderingly whispers):

THE FIRST:

Do you see that waiting figure in the doorway?

THE SECOND *(peering and then pulling his companion away. Gasping with fear):*

Was that dull gleam a scimitar?

THE FIRST:

What's afoot?

(They move to the edge of the playing space and turn toward the dungeon door, where the GUARDSMAN has now opened the gate and entered the darkness. They pray, standing close to each other.)

Jehovah! Jehovah Adonai! Can we give John . . . our life . . . through . . . Thee . . . somehow?

THE SECOND:

To come to Thee?

THE FIRST *(with bated breath):*

Mayhap tonight!

(They hold themselves silently rigid a moment, then steal out of sight.)

OUTCAST

OUTCAST

*The Hated Chief Publican of Jericho Entertains a
Self-Invited Guest at His Richly Laden Table*

THE CHARACTERS

ZACCHÆUS

LEVI MATTHEW, *once Publican of Capernaum.*

SIMON THE ZEALOT

JUDAS OF KERIOTH

OTHER DISCIPLES OF THE GALILEAN

THE MASTER (*invisible and inaudible*).

THE SCENE

A CURTAIN hangs across a wide, flat archway in a house-wall. When the curtain is drawn, the congregation sees through the archway into an inner room, whose plain wall is background for the setting. One end of a narrow banquet table extends into view. Reclining about the table on couches are some of the guests. Zacchæus is behind the table, facing front; he is

in the center of the archway. At his left is Levi; at his right is Simon the Zealot. At the end of the table is Judas. Two disciples recline on the divan nearest the front, back to the congregation and low enough not to screen the view of Zacchæus. Although the meal is finished, the table is still set with heaped dishes and candelabra. A bright light illumines the scene, its source at the left behind the arch-jamb. This symbolizes the presence of the Master at the head of the table, unseen and unheard by the congregation.

THE INCIDENT

A servant enters to draw the curtain. He stands quietly against the wall, right, outside the arch and outside the line of vision, in profile toward the group at table.

ZACCHEUS (*laughing ironically*):

This is the Robber's Cave, Good Master. All Jericho calls it thus—and spits upon its doors.

LEVI:

Capernaum once called my house, "Abomination of Desolation." I know somewhat how you feel, Zacchæus.

ZACCHEUS:

You have praised my treasures, Master.

You see my store of loveliness, garnered from the world's ends, found for me by caravans from Damascus, Arabia, Egypt, and far India. In at my windows blows the scent of roses and of the balsam groves which give our paradisal city its apt name, "The Perfumed." The tinkle of fountains, the ripple of bird-songs, the music of harp and psaltery, fill it with melody.

And yet the treasure of honor, the fragrance of charity, the music of fellowship's laughter never steals in. Here lives a lonely old man in hiding. With the gibbering specter of a world's hatred always beside him, always fastened to him like shadow in sunlight. Bitter, accursed, starved for the littlest kindness—alone! You bring me more blessing than perhaps you know, O Prophet of Nazareth.

LEVI:

Well I know.

SIMON:

I was a zealot, Zacchæus. One of the best haters Jewry ever held. How I loathed you publicans, never doubting you were traitors to Adonai (*he genuflects*) and His Kingdom, since you handled the coinage of

Antichrist, bleeding the chosen ones by the blasphemous taxes of Rome, living by partnership in the iniquity which prevents Messiah's coming; cursing you as quintessential sinners, the leprous contamination of Israel! Yet here I am, a companion of Levi, breaking bread at your table! Because the Master (*he gestures toward the light*) sat me down beside publican and harlot and sinner and taught me compassion and charity, taught me to find a human and neighbor, taught me the major duty of friendship.

ZACCHÆUS:

An honest publican does not believe he does such a heinous thing. Why not be common sense? Rome is our overlord. If we will pay taxes Rome will permit us to manage our own affairs: she will stay at arms' length. There's no wisdom in refusing our shekels on the belief the Messiah and His army of archangels will sweep down and finish the impossible battle we would precipitate by refusing our tribute. We've waited seven hundred years for the Messiah and He has not come. By the tiny compromise of tax-collecting we publicans

keep Palestine from catastrophe! We ought to be appreciated for what we do for our nation.

LEVI:

Zacchæus, my friend, the Master knows that plea all by rote. Do not forget that I was a publican, too. What He cares to know is not your well-rehearsed self-justification: what He cares to know is your heart.

JUDAS:

Any of us can think up reasons aplenty for what we have once decided to do.

LEVI:

Taught us a little to look for the honest man in the heart of a thief, for the pure woman in the heart of the harlot, for the struggling, travailing nobility in the heart of the sinner (*he laughs as he turns to each*) for gentleness in a zealot, for faith in a publican.

ZACCHÆUS (*self-pitying*):

No one understands me. I am anathema. No one gives me the benefit of the slightest doubt. I am a betrayer of the Messiah and His Kingdom out of the Heavens—and for money.

JUDAS (*hoarsely*):

It must be horrible past thinking to betray the Messiah—and for money.

ZACCHÆUS (*to JESUS*):

May I tell you my plight? I need Your pity, Rabboni.

(He waits a moment, bowing his head in gratitude at JESUS' inaudible answer. Then he proceeds. Speciously plausible.)

SIMON:

You need not be afraid to show your heart to our Master.

ZACCHÆUS (*driven back one step from his routine self-justification plea*):

Good Master, Your visit to me is like cool water to one lying spent in the blaze of the desert. I had heard that You did not hate publicans; that You found faith in some, better than Pharisee-faith; that Levi of Capernaum was one of Your chosen. Wherefore I strove to see You today, climbing up into that sycamore tree, just in hope of a kindly glance from Your eyes as You passed. That would have rewarded me amply, Rabboni. For I am dying of hatreds! But you came here! To be the guest with a man who is Jericho's most

despised sinner! Your gracious goodness to me has saved my soul from sheer death. (*He waits while JESUS answers.*) The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost? I was lost, true enough!

LEVI:

So was I, once.

SIMON:

So was I, in hard certitudes.

JUDAS:

Lost! How many ways there are to be lost!

ZACCHÆUS (*in a flood of self-pity*):

How they execrate me! Everyone abhors my every word, look, or deed! I am given credit for no decent emotion. If I were gasping my last by the roadside in agonized torture, there is no single person in all Judea who for good will's sake would cross over to lay a finger on my forehead. No one ever to say, "Well done," when I try. No one to believe anything but the worst of me! I am despised, forsaken, rejected! (*He leans far over the table, toward JESUS.*)

O my Master, You can never know what it is to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: rejected of men!

(There is silence again, while JESUS inaudibly answers him.)

JUDAS (*grimly*):

For His sake are we all disowned.

(They all look at JUDAS, puzzled by his tone. Then they unanimously disregard his interjection.)

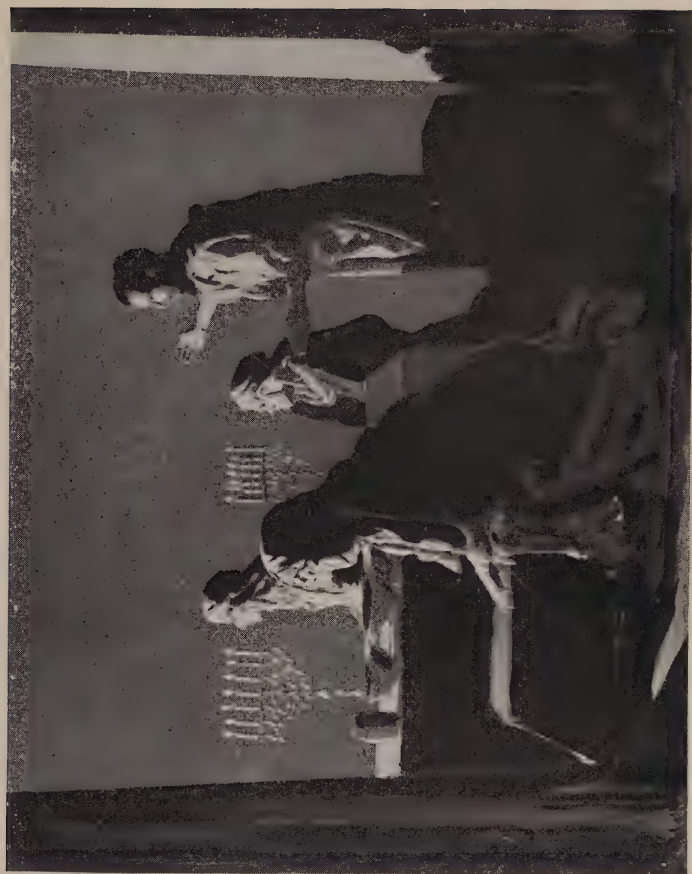
LEVI:

Zacchæus, my brother, the test comes in the way we ourselves meet that hardness of heart.

ZACCHÆUS (*springing upright, with heat*):

How but by hardness! The curse of hatred is that it breeds hatred. How can I defend myself against insolence but by insolence? What armor against scorn can I don except scorn. It is impossible not to grow arrogant against arrogance. The scapegoat of men's spleen cannot bless them that curse him and do good to those who spitefully use him. It is but natural to meet hardness with hardness, bitterness with bitterness, injustice with injustice, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!

MEN CREATE IN US THAT WHICH THEY IMPUTE TO US. IF THEY BELIEVE THE WORST OF US THEY CREATE THAT VERY WORST IN



AT THE TABLE OF ZACCHAEUS THE PUBLICAN

US BY THEIR BELIEF. IF THEY WOULD ONLY BELIEVE THE BEST OF US, THEY MIGHT GO FAR TO CREATE THAT BEST IN US BY THEIR FAITH!

Behold me, Zacchæus, chief publican of Jericho, the trusted arch-agent of Rome the tyrannous, Rome the inexorable, Rome the cold-hearted—rich and crafty, sardonic and bloodless, vengeful, spiteful, extortionate, with a heart like a rock and a will like blue steel—made what I am by this unforgivable, damnable conspiracy of disbelief! Pitilessness has wrought me to its image! I, the accursed, turn living curse!

(He sinks down, his head on his arms. Racked with spent emotion.)

(There is silence for a moment. Then LEVI nods to JESUS and, turning, signals to the other disciples to withdraw from the room.)

LEVI *(softly)* :

The Master would fain be alone with Zacchæus.

(JUDAS leans over and approvingly grasps ZACCHEUS' hand, which lies limply on the table.)

(They withdraw from sight; right. The

servant outside the archway is waved away by a near-by disciple. ZACCHÆUS is left, the only visible person. He draws himself up.)

ZACCHÆUS:

Your eyes are inescapable, Master. (*A pause.*)

I am ashamed.

I know I cannot shift all the blame of what I am. No matter how difficult it may be to answer evil with good, I do know my duty, now that You help me. You are not embittered by bitterness. You are not hardened by hardness.

And—am I right?—You seem to believe in me? I feel the pulse of Your quiet reliance. What, oh! what do You discern in me You can trust?

(Silence again. ZACCHÆUS rises and comes around to the front of the table. He sits, facing the congregation speaking as if to himself. With decreasing vagueness, with increasing coherence.)

ZACCHÆUS (*as if repeating and answering words slowly spoken to him. He signifies assent now and again*):

Love your enemies? . . . Bless them that curse you? Do good to them that hate

you, and pray for them which despitely use you and persecute you? . . . Could I change the direction of the hostile current that has flown in on me, sweeping me into hate? Could I send forth a current of spirit which would catch and sweep others on into good will? . . . For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? . . . Yes, O Rabboni, if we can find any such! . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good? . . . The self in me I have not trusted You do trust? . . . The Spirit in me I have less and less found You empower more and more by Your faith. (*He pauses again. He turns toward JESUS.*)

You know what is in man better than he himself knows!

(He takes his resolve and stands straight, facing the congregation.)

BEHOLD, LORD, THE HALF OF MY GOODS I GIVE TO THE POOR; AND IF I HAVE TAKEN ANYTHING FROM ANY MAN BY FALSE ACCUSATION, I RESTORE HIM FOURFOLD! And tomorrow morning when we go forth into the marketplace . . . stand close . . . and I will say this . . . in love . . . to

the people who hate me! (*He turns toward JESUS.*) LORD! Bless me, the publican! (*He goes left, toward the light. As he passes the arch-jamb he has begun to bend to kneel, out of sight, by the Master. His voice is heard.*)

ZACCHÆUS:

God be merciful to me, a sinner!

LAZARUS TELLS OF HIS DEATH

LAZARUS TELLS OF HIS DEATH

Lazarus, Lying Under the Olive Trees, Weak and Fragile Still from His Recent Experience of Death, Talks with James, the Brother of Jesus, Who Has But Now Reached Bethany; Too Late for the Festal Beginning of Jesus' Palm Sunday Journey to Jerusalem

THE SCENE

LAZARUS is lying on a much-cushioned stretcher on legs, set close to the high wall of the garden, a section of which forms the background for this incident. Above it are a few branches of an olive tree. A vine clammers up the wall. Grass at the foot of the wall. Lazarus is in white. James is in bright colors. If no curtain is convenient, Lazarus may either be helped or carried on by two servants. James seats himself on a cushion, level with Lazarus' knees. Mary and Martha enter later.

THE CHARACTERS

LAZARUS

JAMES

MARY

MARTHA

THE INCIDENT

LAZARUS (*weakly but fearlessly*):

Although you are much my elder, James, and the brother of our Jesus, and although I am still wan and wasted with my illness and my death, I tell you straight your hopeful suspicion is unworthy.

JAMES:

My hopeful suspicion? You are hard with me, my dear young man.

LAZARUS:

You came here hoping to find the rumor that the Master had summoned back my spirit was a falsehood: I swear to you it is no lie. I was dead and I am alive again, and Jesus wrought the work. You, His brother, must hear me through: your desire to pierce the running rumor with a shaft of disillusion is unworthy of one of His kith and kin. I am ashamed of you.

JAMES:

Are you sure you do me no injustice?

LAZARUS:

I cannot comprehend how you can have lived these many years with Him for father and brother and not believe in Him. I know you love Him, but you pity Him for His delusions; you do not believe His commission is from Jehovah. Mary and Martha and I, we do!

JAMES (*trying to calm him*):

I know you do.

LAZARUS:

Always we feel His spirit wooing, calling, summoning ours. Always we feel His strength our comfort. Perhaps we pull on Him: we take His caring, because we are in need. We cost Him much, but He is glad to give and give and give. It appalls me to conjecture what must be the drain on Him by all the poor, all the children, all the outcasts, all the sinners, all the orthodox, all the simple folk whom He so yearns for and for whom so constantly He radiates His compassion. Think what a burden He carries! His resources must truly be as illimitable as God's own! He gives us strength, which seems to mean He takes our weakness on Himself. I fear you do not feel this.

JAMES:

I am afraid I do not. I wonder how much you know of Him, dear lad. You have not seen Him overmuch.

LAZARUS:

I have not known His public majesty. Too long have I been ill to go forth by His side. Reports, however, are borne to me aplenty, even here behind my orchard wall. I can imagine the power of His untrammelled message, the awesomeness of His disturbing, comforting, and healing presence. For I know what He has been to us in this calm place of sanctuary from the storm. Hither He comes whenever He can reach us, to pray beneath these gnarled old olive trees, to sit beside my pallet in the sun, to let us care for Him. Ah, He can speak to us from His full heart, serenely sure that we will try to understand, when all about they twist and misconceive His truth.

(MARY enters. She smooths LAZARUS' hair, adjusts a pillow. She stands behind his couch, smiling down at her brother.)

MARY (to JAMES):

Lazarus and Martha and I are surer every day we are the most blest humans of all

time. Great portents are revealed. This is the hour of consummations.

JAMES:

Can you understand my brother?

MARY:

Two things grow plainer, James. Lazarus nor Martha nor I can seem to blend them, though; they seem so contradictory. The agony of their paradox is piercing deep into our souls. We cannot reconcile them to each other. And yet He dwells upon them both.

LAZARUS:

The first is glorious. HIS HOUR IS COME! His victory approaches. . . . God's victory. You, James, are a sharer of His secret, through your mother. Although it horrifies you and seems a fearful lunacy, although you do not for one moment give it countenance, but with an agony that shows your love for Him who brought you up from boyhood you shrink from the moment when the secret shall be proclaimed, we here believe that Jesus is MESSIAH! MESSIAH incarnate, come in hidden guise to test our quickness of heart and to bring His own Kingdom! Forgive me, James, if I make you wince. But you will yet see.

His hour is come. His triumph is at hand. God will strike, perhaps tomorrow. The signs should begin this very day. Is the sun reddening? My eyes are weak; I cannot bear to look. He says His day has dawned, that God has now delivered all things into His hands; that the Cause for which He came into the world is now accomplished. The world shall know He is the Holy One from Highest Heaven.

MARY (*leaning over the couch to JAMES*):

The other note is, oh, so different! His feet are on a path that leads to catastrophe. He has defied the Pharisees and Sadducees; they plot His doom. He says a cross awaits Him. He says that He will suffer utmost ignominy, utmost death. HE WILL BE CRUCIFIED! And indeed it seems to be inevitable, if God does not make bare His holy arm in the sight of all His people, to rescue Him.

LAZARUS:

Which prophecy is true? It racks me that I cannot think it through and comprehend. May I tell you what Mary and Martha and I are hoping? We think that Jesus, the Messiah, in disguise of human flesh, has come to the moment of His planning;

He is making everyone in Israel test and reveal Himself. Some have loved Him: to them He tells His secret. Some have hated, some have scorned and some have shrugged their shoulders in indifference; they, too, have shown themselves for what they really are. The hierarchy over yonder in Jerusalem has shown itself traitor to its charge of faith: the Messiah has come; the infallible authorities (!) did not recognize Him when He came; they conspire to condemn and crucify Him like a felon; God will let them seem to have their way until they are past all withdrawing from their course, committed and exposed; yes, I believe it may even go so far they bring him to Golgotha, tried, judged, and scourged. Then Jehovah will reveal His Anointed and catch them all red-handed; doomed to forfeiture of the swift-coming Kingdom. THE MESSIAH CANNOT DIE. (*He is growing too excited.*)

JAMES:

My dear lad, calm yourself. You must not ——

MARY:

James! James! You are too late today to repent and go up to Jerusalem with Him.

The pilgrims have gone marching in ecstasy of hope.

LAZARUS:

In Jericho the trumpet of Hosannas sounded. They think Him only the Fore-runner; they are hysterical with their confidence that when He reaches the portal of the Temple there shall be a sign to them that God is ready. I cannot tell you all the throbbing exultation which courses in their veins.

MARY (*breathlessly*):

They have stripped the palm trees to wave the symbols of acclaim to Him who cometh in the Name of the Lord Messiah; they strew their garments in His path!

LAZARUS:

They leap and shout and sing!

MARY:

The hope of the centuries is coming true at last.

LAZARUS:

And Jesus is so much more than they have even hoped!

(MARTHA *enters hastily.*)

MARTHA:

This dear boy must be quieter, I fear. I know how hard it is to lie passive while

all the world is on tiptoe with delirious joy, but it MUST be done, beloved.

JAMES:

I have been patient, Martha, while this dear lad rhapsodized. But all the time I waited for the chance to ask the only question I really came to ask. If he will rest back among his pillows and speak calmly may I have my answer?

MARTHA:

I will heat some lentil broth and call to Mary when it is prepared.

(She hurries out. MARY sits on the couch and holds her brother's hand.)

MARY:

You are curious to know how it seems to have been dead and now to be alive again?

(JAMES nods assent.)

LAZARUS *(speaking dreamily)*:

I fear the tale I tell will not be all you think it should be if my tale is true! My life has seemed to ebb and flow with the consciousness of love about me. My sister Mary has done much to keep breath in this body because the tenacity of her tenderness has held me in its bonds. And Martha, too, albeit she fumes happily about her housekeeping practicalities,

has shown the grip her love has fastened on me if only in the grimness with which she scrubs my bowls and seamless robe. And most of all has Jesus' quiet strength become my anchor. Yes, for myself, I testify my sensitive awareness how I'm held. My own will still to indwell this feeble flesh is compounded of their will that I shall bide here. I have been dead weight upon them. I was content to be so carried, passive and invalid of body and of character.

(MARY shakes her head in loyal dissent at this.)

LAZARUS:

Nevertheless, I failed them. Jesus was far away. I was so tired and the fever burned so deep that I let go. My spirit ebbed and ebbed down past low water mark, below the level you call living. My inmost self went drifting out and out, with will-less vagueness. My anchor-ropes were frayed and broken. My sisters' fingers slipped off the smooth surface of my being. I heard their imploring voices, I saw their outstretched hands, I saw the broken rope go trailing out beyond their grasp. How blissful it was to be unfettered! I was glad to be

unmoored; on the great deep of eternity!
And then a mist came eddying in between
and on the gentle waters of great silence I
fell asleep. I am told I died: I do not
know.

(MARY stoops and kisses his forehead.
She then dries her eyes.)

Then at last, at long, long last, I was
dimly conscious of a Presence. I heard
my sister's wailing, I felt the Lord. A
great peace came upon me. I divined His
Spirit, all to me-ward. It aroused and ral-
lied me. Through the impalpable curtain
of mist came His hand. It strained toward
me. It seemed strangely scarred and
bloody. It caught the trailing rope-end
and began to draw me back. Dead, I
trusted Him implicitly, as, alive, I had
never failed to rest in Him. I heard His
voice. He spoke in anguish. Somehow I
knew it cost Him grievously to come to
me. His life came forth, seeking lost sheep
me! "I am the retrieval and the life,"
He said. "He that entrusts himself to
Me, though he were dead, yet shall he
live." I knew He was not speaking of the
body: I knew He meant the soul. He died
somewhat to reach me. His life was mine,

alive or dead. Heaven had been imparted to my heart. 'For myself it mattered not at all whether I were in the body or released from it. I lived, because He lives! He had come out into death, to give me life.

But for my sisters' sake I must do more. Can I phrase the change which came over me? I began to feel the pulse of initiative in me. I must not be passive: I must do something of my own accord for them. I must put away sick and childish dependence. I must be strong of soul for them. Not fragiley for my own parasitic self, but for their sakes. I must recognize it is more blessed to give than to receive. Almost as if by accident, I found my body waiting for my reborn spirit. Strangely enough, this bodily life seemed more like death than death itself. This bodily life is painful, encumbered, fettered; it is like death beside that freedom of the spirit. Yet for my loved ones' sake I took this death upon me (*he indicates his outstretched body*) to give them life.

MARTHA (*in the distance*):

Mary! Come, dear!

(MARY *rises and goes out.*)

LAZARUS:

It will not be long I'm here again incarnate. Just long enough to tell them I shall not leave them, though I die. My life beyond death will be in Jesus' spirit, too . . . the joy of giving all I am to their lives at the roots of being; a death to self to give them strength to be themselves. The gift of Jesus' spirit into mine makes this all clear.

(JAMES stands, but LAZARUS reaches out a hand and holds his garment.)

LAZARUS:

This is all my tale, flesh-brother of the Lord's humanity. (*He sits upright, his brow furrowed with thought.*) Except for one clue which Mary gave last evening. The feast at Simon's house was like a marriage festival. But nobler. It was the anticipation of that marriage-feast when Lord Messiah comes revealed unto His own and weds Himself to them in a new Covenant of consummated vindication. Jubilant with eagerness we lay about that table. Everyone ardent; everyone with heart-beats high. No note of doubt, no note of sorrow; all triumph and delight. We were doing this not only to anticipate the Heav-

only Bridegroom's coming into His own, but, too, to bring that event to pass by our intercessory Apocalyptic reach. By it we reached into the future and dragged it into our today.

Then Mary came. In her hands she bore an alabaster box of oil of spikenard, very precious. She had bought it, James, to anoint my body for my burial. It had cost her all her savings for long years. (*He grasps JAMES' hand and holds him fast.*) But somehow she could not bring herself to use it, acknowledging my death as final. Was it intuition that held her from its use? To anoint my body would have been acknowledgment that death was quite complete; irrevocable. Now she came to Jesus with this symbolic nard; she crushed its egg-shell container; bedewed the hair and feet of her Lord, weeping silently all the while. What did she mean?

(He swings his feet to the ground, leaning tensely toward JAMES. He continues):

Jesus interpreted her action to us. The perfect loveliness of deed, He called it, praising her. And with wet eyes He said to me, "She hath come aforetime to anoint

Me for my burial!" SHE KNEW HIS DEATH WAS TO BE REAL? She uttered her assurance that she understood what I cannot! This act of hers was death to her own heart: she loves our Jesus more than life itself. Did she reach forward to His future death and somehow actually aid in His accomplishing of it? His death will be her mortal hurt and still she sends Him to it. SHE TAKES HIS DEATH A LITTLE UPON HER SACRIFICIAL SOUL AND GIVES HIM SOMETHING OF HER DEEPEST BEING WITH THAT SPIKENARD OIL. STRANGE HOW MANY WAYS THERE ARE OF TAKING DEATH AND GIVING LIFE! (*He lifts himself to his feet, unsteadily.*)

JAMES! DO YOU . . . SUPPOSE . . . THAT TAKING DEATH . . . UPON A CROSS . . . MAY GO WITH GIVING LIFE . . . FOR THE MESSIAH!!! (*He lets go and drops, sitting, to the couch.*)

I think I hold a clue!

Is this our Master's victory?

(*He lies back on his pillows, wide-eyed. His lips are moving soundlessly.*)

JUDAS OF KERIOTH DRIVES A BARGAIN

JUDAS OF KERIOTH DRIVES A BARGAIN

*Annas and Caiaphas Receive a Midnight Visitant and
Make an Agreement*

THE SCENE AND CHARACTERS

FOR SETTING a background provided by a rich curtain, perhaps ornamented with the Hebrew six-point star of two interlaced triangles. On a dais against this a stately throne, and on either side a tall candelabrum, if possible seven-branched and of the traditional shape with concentric curved arms. A brazier stands before the chair. On the edge of the dais an ewer of water and a goblet.

THE INCIDENT

ANNAS *enters, supported by CAIAPHAS. ANNAS is stooped and feeble, yet his keen eyes glimmer and his wrinkled face is canny and alert. He is sumptuously and over-warmly dressed. CAIAPHAS is tall, stalwart, arrogant toward*

JUDAS, *obsequious toward ANNAS. He is clothed in white-and-gold garments, with a head-dress suggesting a mitre. As ANNAS sits to warm his restless hands at the brazier, CAIAPHAS stands beside his chair, with his arms folded and his brow furrowed with perplexity.*

JUDAS *glides in furtively. He is distraught and unkempt. The gleam of desperation is in his eyes. His voice is hoarse with anguish. His hands tremble and clutch and writhe. He stands back to the congregation almost throughout the episode: it would be too cruel to force him to face us. Care must be taken that he articulates the more distinctly: but the effectiveness of the scene will be enhanced by the unusual position he holds, showing only his back or partial profile.*

JUDAS *impetuously begins; his hands, always in evidence, supply the "expression" the inadequate view of his face makes imperative.*

JUDAS:

Holy sirs! You MUST hear me! For your own sake as well as for my own. You MUST listen!

(CAIAPHAS *draws himself even more erect. He frowns forbiddingly. JUDAS recollects himself. He continues with servile pathos*):

JUDAS:

Forgive me; oh, forgive me! I had meant first to say, "Jehovah the Omnipotent, shed His light and peace upon you, His chosen own, His choice ambassadors of the Covenant." All hail, Lord Caiaphas! All hail, my great and honored Annas, Elder of Elders, Prince of Abraham's seed! . . .

(CAIAPHAS *glances at ANNAS. ANNAS shrugs his shoulders and lifts a hand with ritual formality, giving assent to JUDAS' ritual salutation.*)

CAIAPHAS:

That is better. Remember the honor you owe to such as Annas—and myself. What is your errand, sir? Why have you forced yourself upon us at this indecent hour?

JUDAS:

O my Lord Annas—and my Lord Caiaphas—be not so brusque with me. YOU NEED ME!

(CAIAPHAS *sneers.*)

JUDAS:

Whether or not you realize it, you need me and my message. I have come hither to do you the utmost favor in my power.

CAIAPHAS:

What can you do for us, man?

JUDAS:

May I be pardoned if I presume to suggest that the world guesses you have difficulties with this man Jesus of Nazareth? And that these difficulties are deep? May I be pardoned if I tell you I know a secret which will solve all your difficulties more effectively and swiftly than you dream? I am not bumptious, please Your Graces. I come to you as a prodigal son of the Law penitentially come back to the true faith, praying for absolution and restoration to be granted only by you. I need you, sirs, and, oh! you need me, too!

CAIAPHAS (*looking to ANNAS, who nods permission for JUDAS to continue*):

Be brief!

JUDAS:

I fear I cannot be brief. But I alone can serve you: you only can serve me. I know whereof I speak.

CAIAPHAS:

Who are you? What warrant have we for believing this boast? You are ridiculous!

JUDAS:

But, Caiaphas, I CAN prove what I say. When you arrest Jesus you can test it for yourself. I ask for no benefit or pay until

you have found whether I have indeed put in your hand the weapon you need.

(ANNAS *raises his hand, disregarding*
CAIAPHAS' bombast.)

JUDAS:

I thank you, Lord Annas, that you bid your honored son-in-law allow me to speak.

CAIAPHAS:

Who are you, sirrah?

JUDAS (*turning his profile toward the congregation*):

My name is Judas, after the Great Maccabæan. From the womb have I served his ideal as well as I might. I am dedicated to the hope of my nation, by his name. I come from the village of Kerieth, hard by Jerusalem; where you, sirs, have such large holdings of vineyards and olives. In fact, I once worked in one of them and tried to be a faithful steward for you, lord of the vineyard, making Paschal wine for your sale to the pilgrims in the Temple market—the market in which this Jesus wrought such havoc but yesterday.

(CAIAPHAS *steps forward angrily.*)

CAIAPHAS:

You presume on our patience.

JUDAS (*hastily*):

Forgive me, my lord. I did not mean to twinge a sore nerve. I would not anger you, potent Caiaphas!

CAIAPHAS:

Get to the point. And at once.

JUDAS:

Jehovah be my assurance I am doing right: I am not so sure as I was when I came. O Your Graces, I am a distraught and bewildered fool; I cast myself on your mercy. I feel certain I am doing what I should in coming straight to you. What I have to tell you is unbelievable, absurdly impious, assuredly blasphemous—and yet (O my Lord God!)—and yet I can feel His eyes looking into my heart, wounded and sorrowful, yearning and pleading. . . . I must not remember . . . aught but my bargain with you!

For I have a bargain to make with you if I can. Call it a covenant, if you will. I make a clean breast of my sin; yet my sin puts me in possession of a secret you more grievously need than you dream . . .

CAIAPHAS:

Speak out plainly. Enough of this mystery.

(ANNAS *silences* CAIAPHAS *with a wave of his hand.*)

JUDAS (*speaking always to ANNAS*):

Oh, sir, I am trying to speak out! But you cannot guess how the words gag and choke me. My mouth is dry. May I drink from this ewer? . . . I am grateful, my Lord Annas, for your nod of permission. I am unnerved. See my hand tremble. See how wringing wet is my hair. Is there no pity in the heart of a high priest? There *is* pity in the heart of . . . I should not have said that. I abjectly apologize.

I am a sinner. I have been the companion of a very prince among sinners. My birth-right is forfeit. If I tell you something which will win the quicksilver mob from the Nazarene's side over to yours; which will, lightning-sure, blast Him with execrations Whom hosannas greeted but now; which will put in your hands the weapon of the complete victory which only can keep you possessed of that mitre—if I tell you this unguessable thing will you swear by God's throne between the Cherubim I shall have absolution? By all the sacrifices you may prescribe will you restore my name to the roster of true Israel? And when you turn

over this deserted, anathematized, false Prophet of Galilee to Pontius Pilate for the execution we would prefer to administer for ourselves, will you promise my name shall be missing from the list of His followers, liable also for treason?

CAIAPHAS:

Would you bribe the high priest of Israel?

JUDAS:

I am selling you a son of man, to be your property and chattel. He will be yours, bound and abject. If I deliver Him into your power, most of all by betraying His secret, pay me the recognized price of a slave, thirty pieces of silver, and I will know you recognize me as a freeman of Israel again, for only such can sell slaves. Those silver pieces will be symbolic betwixt us: the covenant of mutual benefit will be fulfilled. . . .

CAIAPHAS:

You swine! I will have naught to do with such bargaining.

(But ANNAS has nodded to JUDAS. He silences CAIAPHAS again.)

Unless . . . my Lord Annas . . . feels . . . otherwise?

JUDAS (*disregarding* CAIAPHAS):

All Galilee first asked the question about this Carpenter, "Is His authority from Heaven or of men?" The multitudes flocked about His skirts, drank in His amazing words, gasped at His miracles, were stirred or disturbed by His doctrine. I confess that I, even though I was the only Southerner of His following, was ecstatically ready to believe that I knew what He was. I cast in my lot with Him, burned all my bridges behind me, because His beauty and spell swept me on into the hope He must be the Forerunner—yes, "He-that-should-come!"

CAIAPHAS:

You idiot.

JUDAS:

I know. But He did not fulfill our specifications. You see, sir, I was trained in them. The Scribes have taught us just how the Kingdom must come. We know exactly what He-that-should-come will be and do; the infallible tradition has been distilled from the prophets. We know the Forerunner will be a mighty doer of magic, the invincible marshal of the host of Jewry prepared for Armageddon, to

fight the Antichrist, and instantaneously topple the Gentile kingdom into the dust.
(*He orates.*)

CAIAPHAS (*sneering*):

Spare us the schoolchild oration. Do we need instruction?

JUDAS:

This man would not even take the first steps to such leadership. He scorned every chance to exploit His gifts: He opposed those who would have taken Him by force and made Him a king. The agony of it was that those of us who were near Him could not but feel He had the power in Him to have done all we hoped for if He would. That is saying much, honorable heads of the household of faith, but I am telling you unconcealed fact. You have not known Him, sirs. You have heard of Him only at a distance, have had Him indirectly interpreted to you. Therefore, I tell you, straight from the shoulder, you have not known Jesus of Nazareth. You have only impersonal theory. Impersonal theory about Him is probably coldly correct: how often I have tried to be coldly discerning—and could not be! We, who were under His spell, believed all things

possible for Him. I have ratification for this awesome trust in His power—the Pharisees who investigated Him, outraged though they were by His calm audacity with their scriptures and statutes, apoplectic though they were at His shattering claims of higher authority than theirs—the Pharisees, I repeat, themselves felt His potency, acknowledged his genius and might. They decided he was Satan's own agent; but they judged Him no ordinary, average devilkin in mortal flesh: they paid Him the reluctant compliment of certainty He could be no less than Beelzebub, Prince Regent of all Satan's kingdom, incarnate before us. His charm, His spell, His allurement (you never felt them and fortunate you are!) all were temptations inherent only in the archangelic Antichrist himself. Always, always, just behind the naturalness and the beauty of His comradeship, we could feel the leashed majesty of the Supernal. I swear that we knew ourselves within arm's-reach of the Invisible and Infinite. I plead it for my extenuation. Would you not have been beguiled by Him? I committed my life—I cast in my all—with . . . Beelzebub in the flesh!

I loved (Jehovah redeem me!) . . . I LOVE . . . Him who I . . . know . . . is my betrayer . . . the Evil One!!! (JUDAS *is in agony.*)

Wretched wretch that I am! I grovel before you, a leper in soul—praying you to deliver me from the living hell of my iniquitous love! (*He falls before ANNAS.*)

(ANNAS *shrugs his shoulders, and spreads out his hands as if to say, "Poor fool!"*)

CALIPHAS:

Must we stay here to watch you writhe?
You are unpleasant.

JUDAS (*lifting himself*):

I must be calm. I have already craved your pardon overmuch, but my agony is utter and my nerves are too taut. (*He stands.*)

Everyone has speculated whom Jesus believes Himself to be. He has never told. The Baptizer called Him the Forerunner. So have His ardent disciples. So has the crowd hoped, in ecstasy. Some have called Him Elijah, some only Jeremiah, some merely a prophet. His family believe Him beside Himself. His home village called Him presumptuous. All the time He Him-

self never uttered one public word save only His message.

Among us disciples there was a cleavage. There was the group which maintained He was the Forerunner. There was myself who increasingly maintained (to myself) He was not true to the true expectation, whatever His spell. There was also a small group closest to Him, which ceased to call Him "He-that-should-come" because they felt He was something different and greater yet! (They did not talk of their idea to me: I was none too popular, Southern and scribal-bred that I am.) They seemed to feel they were close to the Secret. Up on Mount Hermon with Jesus, they had some rapt experience—I know not what—thereafter went about as if in a puzzled trance which turned into exaltation.

One morning, up in the hills, He had us all in a circle about Him, our "Elder Brother-in-God." He turned to Simon and asked, "Whom say men I am?" He told him the various guesses then current in Galilee. Hardly waiting for Simon to finish, His cheeks flushed and his eyes shining (you never saw Him, sirs, that way!)

He continued, "But whom say YE that I am?"

My Lord Annas, before I repeat what Simon said, tell me I shall not be adding to my uncleanness in taking those words on my tongue. For they are monstrous, impossible, the acme of blasphemy. But I do not mean them; my heart is not in them, but shuddering aghast.

(ANNAS *condescends to smile*)

CAIAPHAS:

You are slow in coming to the point of your tale.

JUDAS (*helping himself to a goblet of water which he pours with trembling hands from the ewer, the vessels rattling against each other like chattering teeth*):

May I have another sip of water, sir? . . .
A-a-ah!

These are his actual words,—the very unthinkable syllables: "THOU ART MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE BLESSED." AND JESUS ACCEPTED THAT ANSWER WITH A GLAD SMILE AS OF GREAT PEACE!!! THAT IS HIS SECRET!

(ANNAS *half rises from his chair. He makes a sign on his forehead, lips, ears, and eyes to absolve them from this un-*

clean word of blasphemy. CAIAPHAS shields his face with his palms, then reaches down to the hem of his garment and rends it from hem to neck. There is a thin piece of cloth running vertically down the front of his vestment, the ritual "rending piece" for just this purpose.)

ANNAS (*breaking silence for the first time*):

Jehovah cleanse me from the uncleanness of this blasphemy! Anathema! Anathema!

CAIAPHAS (*gasping incoherent protest*):

Jehovah curse you for defiling us with this leprous blasphemy! This is blasting poison. It goes as far beyond furthest blasphemy as blasphemy goes beyond pious prayer. No renegade Son of Abraham in his utmost audacity or lunacy has ever drifted within brain-shot of such an unthinkable notion!

ANNAS:

This blasphemy out-blasphemes all blasphemies the ears of men have ever heard.

CAIAPHAS (*To ANNAS*):

Even when the prophet Daniel looked straight into the noonday sun and saw there the blinding glory of Messiah shimmering brighter yet upon his pain-pierced

eyes, the most he dared to hint was that Messiah's form is after the similitude of a Son of Man. But who has ever made the far approach to claiming the Messiah might ever show Himself in human flesh. No! No!

JUDAS:

I do not wonder you blench, my Lord Annas. I do not wonder you gasp and choke, my Lord Caiaphas. Protect yourself if you can from the dagger-thrust of such iniquitous impiety. For myself, my senses reeled for days, as I slowly regained aching emotion after the hammer-blow which felled my brain to insensibility. THAT IS HIS SECRET! Jesus thinks himself—MESSIAH!

Have I made good my promise, my Lords?

(ANNAS sits in his chair, his face covered by his hands. As JUDAS proceeds he lowers his hands and his face turns from horror to hatred, from hatred to craftiness, CAIAPHAS paces to and fro behind the throne, pausing now and again to listen to JUDAS.)

JUDAS:

Oh, Annas, do you perceive the weapon I have thrust into your eager hands? You



JUDAS OF KERIOTH TELLS HIS SECRET

have only to make Jesus proclaim what He believes Himself to be and hear the gasp of horror as He smites all Jewry with that ineffably leprous word. Once He says this, not a Son of Abraham will cleave to Him. Even the sinners will rebound to sick and livid intolerance of this which lies beyond the pale of even utmost blasphemy. There are many things the indifferent, the radical, the evil and the over-weening ones, will permit: THIS nightmare insanity will find no countenance ANYWHERE. Jesus is yours! Bound and impotent! In your power! Thus, I, a freeman once again by reparation to the Law, deliver Him into your hands!! Where are the thirty pieces of silver you pay to me, acknowledged my own master once more? For Jesus . . . Who betrayed me; Whom, therefore I sell?

(ANNAS takes a purse from his girdle. He hands it to CAIAPHAS. CAIAPHAS counts out the silver pieces in his palm, to see whether there are enough. He adds some from his own purse.)

(JUDAS starts to mount the steps of the dais.)

CAIAPHAS:

Stay below. You are unclean. Touch me not. (*He means it.*)

JUDAS:

Lord Caiaphas, fear not! Your mitre is safe! This Man shall die and all Israel will be His judge. The Sanhedrin will shrivel in anguish of contamination at the very thought! The hosanna-mob will crucify Him Who made Himself God! Ugh!!

(*He bends forward to ANNAS, talking feverishly.*)

I will deliver Him to you secretly; now that you have His Secret. Set your plans; make the punishment swift; do not let Passover find Him alive. He is so amazing, so unpredictable, that He might again cast His spell.

(*He grows intense. He is tragically honest.*)

Do you think I have done right, my Lord Annas? Assure me I have done honorably by Jehovah and the Covenant! Help me shout down this pestilent voice in the back of my heart which tells me I am betraying Him I should not. On my knees to you, clutching the hem of your garment, tell

me—tell me He has no power from on High! Tell me He cannot possibly be what He claims!

I will test Him myself! When the guardsmen go to arrest Him, let me go alone to Him first and kiss Him as if I believed. (I do not know; perhaps I do!) Then if the Heavens speak, we are safe! If they do not, we are safe, also!

But how well I know what He believes is unthinkable. God would not mingle His life with our human lives! God is in Heaven: man is vile earth. God's being and man's being eternally not to be blended: God and man are so alien each to the other! Man cannot make himself God, because God cannot make Himself man! We must not ask of ourselves God's life!! That would be blasphemous! That would be what Jesus proclaims of Himself! O, my God! O, my God! O, my God! . . . Pity my misery! . . .

CAIAPHAS:

Man-seller, hold out your hands!

JUDAS:

The coins? The thirty pieces of silver?
From Jehovah's highest stewards of
Right!

You must be right: yes, of course!
One! . . . two! . . . three! . . . four! . . .
five! . . . Jesus! Do not look at me so!
. . . ten! . . . twelve . . . fifteen! . . . I
am a free man. . . . Twenty-one! . . . My
life is safe again. (No! I will not listen
to you when You say he who saves his life
will lose it!) . . . Twenty-six . . . I am
no longer a sinner! . . . Twenty-eight?
. . . How dark the night is! . . . Thirty! !

(He turns toward the audience, staggering as a dying man. His face is contorted, his eyes staring. He whispers.)

If only . . . I did not know . . . my
heart is wrong! !

Oh, my God!

(He screams) Oh, God! My God!

(His voice fails him.) Jesus! Forgive
me!

*(He reels forth. ANNAS beckons to
CAIAPHAS to assist him. He chuckles
evilily as he totters forth.)*

GABBATHA

G A B B A T H A

*Procula Upbraids Her Husband, Pontius Pilate, for
His Craven Betrayal of a Righteous Man*

T H E S C E N E

THE SUGGESTING background of this dialogue need only be a tall screen of wall-board, marked with the joints between large stones. Irregular veinings will indicate marble. Against this should be set either a Roman folding chair or a stone bench, a drapery of rich stuff flung across it, a rug before it.

Pilate is dressed in Roman toga, with a fillet across his forehead. Close-clipped hair; smooth-shaven face; heavy bracelets and armlets on his bare arms. High, laced sandal-boots. Procula in some vivid color, her hair bound with a golden fillet. Sandals. Possibly a cloak.

T H E I N C I D E N T

PROCLA *hurriedly and nervously paces to and fro.* When PILATE enters she obviously

endeavors to calm herself. She is ice-cold toward him.

PROCLA:

Well?

PILATE (*evasively*):

I hope you are not too disappointed in your husband, Procla?

PROCLA:

You should be able to conjecture how I feel. You have been a coward.

PILATE (*blustering*):

I have not condemned the Man. I washed my hands of all responsibility. The priests assumed it; what is done is their affair, not mine. "His blood be on us and on our children," they shouted. Unanimously, my dear—unanimously.

PROCLA:

Not to decide is to decide—and to decide wrongly, Pilate. You are a coward and you have betrayed a just man. In that betrayal you have betrayed me, your wife, also. In that betrayal you have betrayed the truth for which Rome stands.

PILATE:

What is truth? I have been trying to find out just now.

PROCLA:

Pilate, my husband, sit you there and let me speak. You owe it to me.

PILATE:

Now, Procula, just because you had a dream-vagary about this peasant Carpenter from that plague-center of rabid disloyalty called Galilee you let it tie your gentle soul in knots and let it come between you and your husband, who does his simple duty as Procurator of Judea!

(Nevertheless, he sits)

PROCLA:

Answer me honestly, on your honor and your love for me.

PILATE *(laughingly humoring her and making a mock gesture of an oath)*:

I swear, beloved.

PROCLA:

How did the Man impress you. Answer me on your oath.

PILATE:

Why, very favorably. Personally He attracted me rather strangely. His eyes were inescapable. I . . . I *(He smiles uneasily.)*

PROCLA:

Do you think He is guilty of sedition?

PILATE (*with sudden heat*):

No, I do not. I know perfectly well He is a dreamer, no zealot rebel against Rome. He told me His kingdom is not of this world, and as I looked into His eyes I knew He was in a different world from those clutching, scheming ecclesiastics lined up there outside the Pavement. I know full well He is an unfortunate, innocent, and even mighty visionary; deluded, but strangely moving. I know those Sadducees are really deathly afraid of Him. He might be what they call a prophet and upset their system and its perquisites of power and plunder. Why only this week with a scourge of small cords He stampeded the Temple bazaar and jeopardized their Passover profits. I know . . . I . . .

PROCUA (*interrupting*):

And you? You were afraid of Him yourself, also!

PILATE:

My wife, I know nothing about the eerie superstitions of that world in which He thinks He moves. In which you also seem to live too much. I am a practical man: my heart and head are ice-cold (except

toward you, my dear) and I must not grow emotional. This Fellow stirred emotions, I admit. If there should be such a thing as spiritual power, perhaps He has it. But I am dealing with Tiberius Cæsar and could I afford to stir up trouble in this pestiferous furnace of discord with my very head unsafe upon my shoulders? You know Tiberius has warned me next time there is a turmoil here . . .

(He draws his finger swiftly across his throat and grins ruefully)

PROCUA:

That Carpenter from Galilee was and is your judge as well as Cæsar.

PILATE:

But, Procula, I did not condemn Him. Hear me out. *(He rises and dramatizes the scene of which he tells.)* Let us suppose there is such a thing as spiritual power from another world. Let us theoretically suppose this dreamer possesses it. Suppose there had been a clap of thunder and a flicking flame of lightning to herald the descent of undreamed archangels from the clouds to vindicate the preposterous claims of this clean-hearted, sad-eyed Seer. If all this had happened, I

was safe. Everything I said and did out there upon the Pavement was blameless. I seated Him in the chair of judgment and said "Behold your King!" What fault could Heaven find with that; even if the rabble interpreted it as sarcasm? I put Him in white and sent him to Herod, exactly as a candidate for office goes white-clad in the Forum, nominated for popular allegiance. What fault could Heaven find with that? I even wrote a title for the cross to which I did not condemn him, which reads "KING OF THE JEWS." I would not change its wording: that was the only safe one. What fault could Heaven find with that? I washed my hands in ceremonial denial of all responsibility for His death. What fault could Heaven find with that?

PROCLA (*in horror*):

Your cowardice passes my fears of it. What matters it if it is clever or plausible or safe, whichever way events work out. My husband come to this ignominy of betrayal! My husband standing nakedly a traitor to all justice, truth, and right! Whatever gods there be, you have deserved their judgment.

PILATE (*trying to pacify her*):

All this because you had a dream!

PROCLA (*breaking from him and seating herself before him*):

Pilate! Pilate! Hearken! I will tell you what it is that you have done to me and done to the true God, Whoe'er He be. Do you know that everyone who loves another puts his heart into that other's keeping? So long as that beloved one lives nobly the entrusted heart keeps beating; pulsing the blood of the only Life that counts back into the entrusting lover. You have been not only the steward of my heart, but by my love the bearer of my life. All the years you have fought and struggled your way up from commonalty to patrician rank and office, you have carried my joy, my strength, my ideals, my soul bound fast to you. Your troth has been my possibility of pure gladness. Your virtue has been the essential food of my essential self. But now, after these many, many years when you have been my inmost being's being, you have betrayed my soul. Something vital in me has been slain. A part of me is numbed to inert death. Your

craven failure is my bleeding wound. How bitter true it is that one's disloyalty to himself is likewise death to those whose faith in Life is tangled inextricably with him they love. You were responsible to me, for my life is involved in your honor or dishonor, greatness or baseness, sacrifice or poltroonery! You have made it hard for my soul to live! You have taken the faith in humanity and the only faith in the only God I can at all find, and have dealt it a death-blow. Oh, it is unfair to gain and then abuse so hideously love's stewardship of faith! Unfair! Unfair! (*She covers her face.*)

PILATE (*haltingly stammering*):

You take it too hard, my dear. I have a right to decide for myself, have I not?

PROCUA (*standing, white and cold*):

To decide for yourself? That is a stark impossibility. Each one of us involves all those who love him in every decision he makes. His alteration changes their lives from within by what he is—their death or life. Love binds lives closer and faster than chains. Each decides for all of whom he is a living part.

PILATE (*brokenly*):

That Man said something about being crucified for the life of His own.

PROCUA:

If He said that, He has the clue. He is true, even to the death you permit, that the life He is to the souls of His own may not be killed by His faithlessness. What He is, despite a cross, is their life and their faith in their God!

PILATE (*holding out his hands in entreaty*):

Perhaps I have failed you. But, Procula, my wife, no matter what of death I have brought to your faith in me, in mankind, in a mysterious God Whom you glimpse behind your ideals, you are being new life to my soul this very hour—and by your agony. Even if the self I am is death to your soul, more than ever you are life to mine by your pain.

PROCUA:

Out there in the portico you asked the Galilean, "What is truth?" Pilate, my husband, is all this perhaps the answer He has wrought? For and in us?

(*She is spent. She sinks into the chair, and PILATE buries his face on her knees.*)

NAKED EVIL

NAKED EVIL

Gamaliel the Rabban Studies Barabbas the Robber

THE SCENE

THE ANTEROOM of Gamaliel, outside the Sanhedrin Council Hall. It is indicated by a bare wall, marked off with joints as between great stones, with perhaps a high, narrow window piercing it. A table covered with scrolls and writing implements. Two or three heavy chairs, one at the center of the table, facing the congregation. A lighted lamp on a standard beside the table. Moonlight (blue) through the window. The light, ostensibly from the lamp, should shine on the face of Gamaliel at his table. Barabbas should remain a dark figure, never illuminated.

CHARACTERS

GAMALIEL, *A Rabban of the Sanhedrin.
Mature, kindly, and fine.*

A PHARISEE, *emaciated, stern, and intense.*

A ROMAN CENTURION, *gentlemanly, melancholy, but stern.*

BARABBAS THE ROBBER

A ROMAN LEGIONARY

THE INCIDENT

GAMALIEL *enters, companioned by the PHARISEE. GAMALIEL is in white. He is gray-bearded and gray-haired. The PHARISEE is in blue. Phylacteries on forehead and right hand. GAMALIEL stands behind the chair at his table. The PHARISEE paces up and down, but not too continuously.*

THE PHARISEE:

Rabban Gamaliel, you go too far.

GAMALIEL (*smiling*):

So you have vouchsafed to inform me without ceasing. For my own good, too?

THE PHARISEE:

You dabble in dangerous waters. Albeit you are one of our greatest teachers, you jeopardize your prestige by such speculations as you indulge in. They come close to impiety.

GAMALIEL (*seating himself*):

I merely attempt to unravel the snarl in my mind this problem has caused.

THE PHARISEE:

To ask some questions, even in the depths of one's heart, borders on blasphemy. Remember the fate of the two who peered into the Ark! You are doing just that.

GAMALIEL *shrugs his shoulders*.

THE PHARISEE:

Why not accept God's will as inscrutable and unalterable? If a man is evil, treat him as such and leave him to his fate. Why sympathetically inquire the whys and the wherefores? Does wisdom lie that way, the way of sympathy? Why study him, philosophize, and work with him?

GAMALIEL (*as patiently as possible*):

Wisdom is my calling. I count not myself to have apprehended all I should know. Not yet. The problem of evil is a tragic one; I cannot turn my back on it.

THE PHARISEE:

I can! And I do! I accept things as they are. Evil is not my problem; righteousness is *my* calling. I am a Pharisee of Pharisees, separatist by name and conviction. You are in peril of uncleanness by this intimacy with evil. Soon you will be as much friend of sinners as this Carpenter from Nazareth who angers us so with His

passion for publicans and His friendship with outcasts. In the Name of the Ineffable One Who has said: "I the Lord form the light and the darkness, I create evil," I plead with you to forsake this obsession with iniquity. You will be contaminated even by studying it.

GAMALIEL (*spreading his hands*):

But what is the fascination of evil, my brother? Is there something mingled in evil which gives it its hold, something which allures because men feel the something is of worth, something human hearts crave for their satisfaction? Mixed with the evil, which should repel, is some unfairly entangled divineness? Only God should attract. Naked evil should not be tempting. I want to strip evil of its cloak of allure-ment.

THE PHARISEE (*giving it up*):

You are no Pharisee! You are unclean!

GAMALIEL (*rising*):

Then perhaps you had best leave my contaminating presence. Because I am expecting a sinner any moment, to study.

THE PHARISEE (*curtly*):

Who is coming?

GAMALIEL:

The Centurion from the Tower of Antonia by Pilate's permission brings me—Barabbas.

THE PHARISEE (*aghast*):

Barabbas!!

GAMALIEL:

The highwayman, the rebel, the murderer, the disbeliever! Add any epithets you may please. Do not fear aught but his ceremonial defilement. He will be in chains. Your skin is safe; your soul may not be.

THE PHARISEE:

Never fear, I will go.

(He starts to leave, but is confronted in the doorway by the CENTURION and BARABBAS.)

THE CENTURION (*ignoring the PHARISEE and speaking to GAMALIEL*):

Behold here the shepherd and a very fractious goat of the flock.

(The PHARISEE does not go out. He leans for a moment against the wall at the extreme edge of the scene. The CENTURION thrusts BARABBAS, none too gently, before GAMALIEL, who watches him quizzically.)

THE CENTURION (*pushing BARABBAS forward*):
Face the Rabban.

GAMALIEL: I am grateful for the privilege of talking with you, Barabbas.

THE CENTURION (*to BARABBAS*):
Answer him, highwayman.

(BARABBAS *stands sullenly silent.*)

GAMALIEL:

I am neither judge nor executioner; this visit has naught to do with your fate by and by.

THE CENTURION:

He has judgments aplenty already.
Enough to crucify him three times over.

GAMALIEL:

I know. For sedition, for killing a Roman, for robbery and all other violence. And Rome happens to be sensitive on the subject of her law. Why are some men so bewitched by defiance?

BARABBAS (*breaking silence with a snarl*):

Who wants to be a driveling and a spineless booby? Some of us want to keep our backbones unbent!

GAMALIEL:

Defiance is partly endeavor for self-respect, then? Even by foulest violence? H'm!

BARABBAS (*blazing*):

I am no milksop! I'll not be any man's puling slave! We outlaws are our own masters! You are not! You sell your freedom for "honors" and "titles" (*he sneers as he says it*); you are led by the nose! You are not your own! You are cowards!

THE CENTURION (*to GAMALIEL*):

He orates rather well!

BARABBAS:

A man under sentence of crucifixion need not fear to cast his curse in your teeth. You can do no worse to me for it. I am freer than you who are under "authority" (*he says it sneeringly*), which sucks the soul out of you. You are in chains worse than these.

(He lifts his arms until the chains are taut. The fetters rattle.)

THE CENTURION:

But authority saves so much painful initiative, friend.

BARABBAS:

Call me no friend, you paid killer. You do even murder on order.

GAMALIEL:

Why do you kill, highwayman?

BARABBAS:

No one shall stand between me and my liberty. Any enslaver I knife. I would sooner slay tyrants than swine. You cannot make me the meek servant of any domination of sword or of terror of hell. I defy any Roman legion to make me a subject. I defy any Pharisee to make me a thrall to his statutes. I will have naught to do with any law save impudently to violate its every command.

GAMALIEL:

You interest me, Barabbas.

BARABBAS:

You do not interest me in the least, slave of "Holiness."

GAMALIEL:

Brute that you are, brother robber, you are allured by an ideal of liberty. *That* is not evil; it is your good. God is in it: He gave you that hunger. *Is the bewitchment in evil always an ideal?*

BARABBAS:

I know no God. Nor do I desire to know one. Gods are enslaving tyrants. I am mine own God.

(The PHARISEE shrugs his shoulders in complete disgust and steals out.)

THE CENTURION (*drawing his sword and holding it hilt upward. Addressing it*):

Here is the idol of Rome.

BARABBAS (*suddenly wrenching at his manacles, breaks a link in the chain between his hands. He grasps the sword-hilt and wrenches the blade from the CENTURION. With the point at the CENTURION'S throat he holds him at sword-length.*)

I have been awaiting my chance. I had a link in my chain worn thin on the edge of a stone in my dungeon. I have been plotting escape: you have aided me much by this whimsy, Gamaliel.

THE CENTURION:

Barabbas, you are a fool. There are ten guardsmen outside in the corridor. I have only to shout.

BARABBAS:

If you shout I will slit your throat for it, army slave. I have nothing to lose, but you have.

GAMALIEL:

This is very interesting indeed. Now naked evil appears!

BARABBAS:

A shrouded figure, in the orthodox garments of a dead Rabban (*he jerks his head*

toward GAMALIEL), will pass safely out of the Temple. Take off your cloak, Torah slave. I do not want it spotted with blood.

THE CENTURION:

Nevertheless, I shall shout. Unless you give back my sword. You will be caught, and scourging will be added to your crucifixion torments. By forgetting you have snatched a Roman's sword for a moment of bluster I can save you the scourging.

BARABBAS:

Rome will never catch me. I can escape crucifixion. If I do not get away to the hills I can open a vein for myself. Liberty either way, mercenary! Get back to that wall.

GAMALIEL:

Have you anyone dear to you, Barabbas?

BARABBAS:

Pah! Not I. I LIVE FOR MYSELF.

GAMALIEL (*rising*):

You help solve my riddle for me at last.
The evil has spoken.

BARABBAS:

I do not know what you mean. Nor am I concerned to find out. Take off that cloak or I run you through.

GAMALIEL:

This affair is none of mine ; you are Rome's prisoner, not Israel's. Nevertheless, I refuse to be commanded by you. Are you so selfish you can think of no will but your own?

BARABBAS (*thrusting the CENTURION back until he stands beside GAMALIEL, against the wall*):
Hold your hands high. Both of you.
(*They obey*)

GAMALIEL (*to the CENTURION*):

Accept my gratitude, Roman. Barabbas has been of much aid to me, after all. He clarifies my thinking quite effectually. I am vindicated. There IS no allurements but God and goodness, after all! Even in evil the central fascination is from on High; it is misguided seeking that makes the evil. Selfishness is the only sin; it takes God and turns His divineness against Himself. Misuse of God! But it is God who's misused! Yonder is a betrayer of the God in his life. But he cannot keep God out of his life, even out of the evilness he himself has made of it. Even the allurements of such a life testifies God is the only allurements. The fascination of what we call evil is some rightness in it; the revolt-

ing horror of evil is its use for the self.
Betrayal of God is the evil! God misused!
Not for God, but for self!

BARABBAS:

At the point of the sword you philosophize, Jew? Ignoring me, your imminent killer? Are you lunatic?

(There is a sudden, thunderous knock at the door.)

BARABBAS *(to the CENTURION)*:

Answer, Roman puppet!

THE CENTURION *(calling)*:

Who is there?

A LEGIONARY *(outside)*:

A squad from the Legion, sir. Let me in.
I have news.

BARABBAS:

What news?

THE CENTURION:

What news?

THE LEGIONARY:

Barabbas the robber is to be released.

BARABBAS:

What! Released!

THE LEGIONARY:

Pilate bids you bring him to the Pavement.
It is the Day of Preparation of the Pass-over, you remember.

THE CENTURION:

What of that?

THE LEGIONARY:

When to curry favor with the rabble Pilate releases one prisoner each year.

BARABBAS (*to the CENTURION*):

Take your sword. I am your prisoner again, for the moment. (*To GAMALIEL*) Open the door.

(*He puts the sword into the CENTURION's hand and adopts the pose of the meekest of prisoners. GAMALIEL goes to the door and admits the LEGIONARY.*)

THE CENTURION:

Explain yourself, legionary.

THE LEGIONARY (*saluting, with the Roman salute of upraised right hand*):

The Procurator sends for Barabbas. One Jesus of Galilee was arrested this morning, for calling himself the King of the Jews. (*He smiles scornfully despite his official rôle.*) In a maudlin moment Pilate—Forgive me, sir! I should not have said that! I apologize!—Pilate attempted to persuade the mob to choose this man Jesus as the annual sop to their fanatic faith. But the priestlings whipped up a sudden

fervor for no less a man than this Barabbas it cost us so much labor and bloodshed to snare. (*He is bitter.*)

GAMALIEL:

Barabbas for Jesus! Barabbas for Jesus!
What a choice!

BARABBAS:

I go free!

THE CENTURION:

Jesus dies for you.

BARABBAS:

Should I be grateful to him? I am not
overmuch touched! He fails, but I win.

THE CENTURION (*to GAMALIEL*):

This is hideous. Yet I must obey.

GAMALIEL:

This man of Nazareth was much too
unique for our system.

BARABBAS:

Said I not you are both spineless slaves?

THE CENTURION:

Take your prisoner.

(*The LEGIONARY salutes again. He
prods BARABBAS into position before
him. Then he speaks to the CENTU-
RION.*)

THE LEGIONARY:

You are to come with us, sir.

THE CENTURION:

I prefer not to come.

THE LEGIONARY:

But, sir, the orders are that you shall command that squad of our soldiers which is to crucify this Jesus of Nazareth.

THE CENTURION (*hesitating a little, then swinging about*):

If I must, then I must.

BARABBAS (*slyly leering at him and speaking tauntingly under his breath*):

Spineless slave!

(*Out they go, leaving GAMALIEL alone.*

He walks to and fro in deep thought.)

GAMALIEL (*to himself*):

Will God or man win? Will God or self? God is the only allurements: but self turns Godhood against God. What iniquity! (*He seats himself, meditating.*) Will divineness or selfishness triumph in such a heart as mine own? How evil to fight against God with the Godhood committed to us! (*A pause. He rises again and, standing behind the table, speaks again to himself.*) What is of man must come to

naught. What is of God, man cannot overthrow it, lest haply we be found even to fight against God.

(He sighs, raises and drops his hands helplessly and goes out, wrapped in thought.)

"WITHOUT A CITY WALL"

“WITHOUT A CITY WALL”

*Simon of Cyrene at Last Returns to His Two Lads,
Alexander and Rufus, after a Catastrophic
“DAY OF THE PREPARATION”*

THE SCENE

THE BACKGROUND should suggest a striped Bedouin-like tent, with its front raised as a portal. Under its shelter the two sons of Simon act the first portion of this incident. Alexander and Rufus are sturdy, bronzed lads, dressed in simple homespun tunics. Alexander is perhaps fifteen, Rufus is twelve.

When Simon comes, he is dressed in a be-draggled tunic and head-cloth. He is also bronzed and stalwart, although he has obviously been abused and manhandled.

THE CHARACTERS

SIMON OF CYRENE

ALEXANDER }
RUFUS } HIS SONS

THE INCIDENT

ALEXANDER *enters, helping his brother along. They are harried and furtive. RUFUS is spent with grief. ALEXANDER attempts to keep up his stamina.*

ALEXANDER:

Just as we thought, brother. There is no one left in the camp.

RUFUS:

We watched everyone go.

ALEXANDER:

You see the Law says the Passover must be eaten in a house. Tents will not do. The Law is particular about that.

RUFUS (*slipping to the ground*):

I wish father would come back to us.

ALEXANDER (*sitting on the bench*):

Jehovah cannot let him be lost after all he has done for Jehovah!

RUFUS:

But I am afraid! So afraid!

ALEXANDER:

So you have said every hour since morning, my brother. So am I afraid, down in the bottom of my heart, but I cannot let myself say so!

RUFUS:

Can father be safe?

ALEXANDER:

Even in the hands of rough Roman soldiers we can believe he will remember us. And remembering us, alone here so far from home, will he not escape if he can? Trust father to outwit even a legion of Romans!

RUFUS:

Nevertheless, it is sunset, and the Pass-over will soon begin, and he has been gone ever since early morning, and if he were free would he not already be here? (*He weeps in silence.*)

ALEXANDER:

Perhaps he has been here while we were gone. I will hunt for traces of his presence. (*He goes within.*)

RUFUS:

Would the Romans let him go free after he carried that fainting Man's cross out to Golgotha?

ALEXANDER (*emerging from the tent*):

He has not been here.

RUFUS:

We are far, far from home, Alexander. Do you think we can find our way back to Africa without him? Could we get home to mother alive?

ALEXANDER (*comforting him*):

We have each other. And possibly father will find us again.

(There is a pause. RUFUS crouches disconsolate at ALEXANDER'S knees. ALEXANDER wipes his eyes with the back of his hand and sits straight and tense, looking wide-eyed into space. Suddenly he exclaims):

ALEXANDER:

That was the ram's-horn trumpet, I think! Did you hear it, Rufus? Passover has come!

RUFUS:

And what a Passover for us! It will soon be dark.

ALEXANDER:

But this is a natural darkness. Not like the queer, ghostly darkness, half this afternoon. THEN I WAS AFRAID! Something was wrong in God's world!

RUFUS:

And through those horrible three hours I did not have even you!

ALEXANDER:

I am sorry, brother of mine. If I had dreamed such murk and wind were to come, I would not have made the vain attempt

which seemed so necessary. I think the happenings in the Temple were to blame for the raw nerves of that priest who took my lamb away from me and would not return it. It is not every day the Veil of the Holiest Place is so easily rent asunder.

RUFUS:

How I hope the Messiah will not count it against us that we have no Passover lamb! It does seem only fair He should not blame us when we took father's purse for him and, because he could not go to the market, bought a lamb, took it to the priest to be killed for our Passover, and then the priest snatched it away! Leaving you empty-handed!

ALEXANDER:

He said I was not the head of a family; If father is lost, I AM the head of our family!

RUFUS:

I will tell the Messiah how brave you were.

ALEXANDER:

What else could I do? Could I let all our hard Passover journey from far Cyrene come to naught because our father was forced at the point of Roman spears to carry the cross of that poor Man who

fainted? Father could not buy our Paschal lamb, on which everything so depends. Therefore I must take his place. If some man of our family does not eat the Passover here in Jerusalem and the Messiah should come at last, mother, father, grandfather, our sisters, you and I would be cast into outer darkness for the thousand years of His reign. We would have no home in the New Jerusalem out of the skies in which Messiah will gloriously reign! All for the lack of a mouthful of roasted lamb! Are you (since day before yesterday) a Son of the Law and do not know this? You have been told it a thousand times over!

RUFUS (*pacing to and fro, wringing his hands*):

And now we have no Paschal lamb, after all! And father is gone! And salvation is gone from us all! It does not seem just!

ALEXANDER (*following him and stopping him*):

Nevertheless, let us do even the little we can do, for father's sake.

RUFUS:

And for mother's? (*A pause*) But what is there we CAN do?

ALEXANDER:

It may not be enough to please the Messiah, but it is the utmost there is left for us to do. Get me the unleavened bread from the packet. I will find the wine-skin.

(He hastily brings out earthenware dishes and a silver cup. RUFUS aids him, numbly uncomprehending.)

RUFUS:

What are you going to do, Alexander? Is it not blasphemous for you and me to touch this Paschal bread and wine? I am all atremble with fright.

ALEXANDER:

Rufus, my brother. Father is not here. Perhaps he will not come again. We must therefore do all we can in his stead. It is a pitiful makeshift we can carry through, just you and I, with only this bread and this wine. Pray God the Messiah will be compassionate on two lonely lads doing all in their power to give their loved ones the right to the Kingdom, while their hearts are breaking for woe!

RUFUS:

How many plates shall I place?

ALEXANDER:

Four, one for the Messiah, and one for father.

RUFUS:

And two for us. . . . But, Alexander, even if father should return, could he touch the bread and wine? Is he not unclean?

ALEXANDER (*recollecting this*):

Yes, he is as unclean as any leper! Our blessed father! That accursed cross has ruined everything; it even makes him unclean! There would be no time for him today to cleanse himself from so grievous a contamination as that of the cross. (*He pauses.*) If Messiah comes, I will beg Him to cleanse him. HE could touch him and make him clean!

RUFUS:

It is growing dark, brother! I dread tonight's black hours and hours.

ALEXANDER:

Now, of all times, hold yourself courageous. Do not fail mother and father—and me! Stand there at the foot of the bench. Stand straight and strong! Pray hard! Help me to remember what I ought to say. With no lamb, no roof, no father

and no comfort, I must at least get the blessing right. (*He masters his anguish with the cry:*) O God! we have only bread and wine, tears and terror! Help me! Help me! Help me!

(*He takes the unleavened bread.*)

Can it be I cannot remember? So much depends on remembering!

(*There is throbbing silence as the two forlorn lads wrestle for recollection.*

SIMON OF CYRENE quietly enters, sees his sons at their pathetic improvised ritual, and stands smiling tenderly.)

ALEXANDER (*raising the bread and breaking it. Eyes still closed.*):

THIS . . . THIS IS THE BREAD . . . THIS IS THE BREAD OF MISERY WHICH OUR FATHERS ATE IN THE LAND OF EGYPT. ALL . . . THAT ARE HUNGRY, COME AND EAT: ALL THAT ARE . . . NEEDY, COME, KEEP THE PASCHA! . . . THE BREAD OF MISERY!

(SIMON steps silently to the "table," drops on his knees, and holds up his hands for a fragment of the bread.

ALEXANDER opens his eyes, sees his father and holds rigid for an instant. Then, dropping the bread, he flings

himself upon his father with a great cry:)

ALEXANDER:

Father! My Father! (*In which cry and act RUFUS joins him.*)

SIMON (*clasping them close, still on his knees*):

My sons! Alexander! Rufus! Jehovah be praised I find you safe!

RUFUS:

We were in agony for you, father. We were afraid you might be dead!

ALEXANDER:

Yet we were trying to celebrate the Pass-over for your sake.

RUFUS:

To give our family the right to the Messiah's Kingdom. But the Messiah has not come.

SIMON (*rising*):

I am not so sure.

RUFUS:

And you were not there if He did come!

SIMON:

I am not so sure.

ALEXANDER (*pulling him down to the bench and sitting close beside him*):

Today has been a ruined day. Your every

hope is blasted! OUR PASSOVER IS
WRECKED.

SIMON:

I am not so sure.

And you are unclean, father! As unclean
as a leper! Because you touched that
cross. (*But he perches himself on SIMON's
knees.*)

SIMON:

I am not so sure.

ALEXANDER:

At what do you hint?

SIMON:

My head and heart are all awirl, beloved
lads. I have had an experience this day
which mightily bewilders but mightily ex-
alts me. Howbeit, of this one thing I am
unquestioningly aware, this day which ap-
pears so dire a catastrophe has not been
what it seems. That Man whose cross I
carried was no vicious knave, worthy of
such a death. He was awesomely a hero
—and perhaps something much more than
a hero.

RUFUS:

They crucified him?

ALEXANDER:

Did they make you bear His cross all the

long road to Golgotha from the place where the guardsmen saw us going up to the Temple and haled you from your boys?

RUFUS:

Those brutal legionaires would not let us follow you.

ALEXANDER:

Is the Man dead?

SIMON:

Never man died like this Man!

(The lads wait for further explanation. Their father quite obviously sees the image of the Crucified One before his mind's eyes. He speaks in hushed tones):

Never, never man died like this Man! Death is only an empty container; it can be filled with what one wills. And what it is filled with it is! As life can be filled with love or hate, pride or courage and becomes that with which it is filled. As every little death—like duty or sacrifice—can also be filled with what we are!

Death can be filled with bitterness and defeat: one thief who perished ignominiously beside this Man filled his death with cursing foulness; that is what he made of his death.

Death can be filled with realization; the

other thief who died beside this Man made his death all contrition, cleansing sorrow. Death can be filled with sweet resignation; this Man's death was all peace.

Death can be filled with martyrdom: this Man's death was truth given power!

Death can be filled with a spirit so vital that usual deaths cannot interpret its miracle; this Man's death was so filled with Life I can only say it WAS Life! Such Life as imparts itself to each and all who are open to it.

Oh, never man died like this Man!

RUFUS:

And you carried His cross for Him?

SIMON (*hands on RUFUS' shoulders*):

Son of mine, as long as you live, as long as your children's children learn the tale, tell it of me as the greatest merit of my little life—I took up His cross and followed Him, bearing it for Him.

ALEXANDER:

You did not feel so at first. When we last saw you you were angrily protesting at the soldiers' cruel wrenching you from us.

RUFUS:

A cross is loathsome. And unclean. So say the priests.

SIMON:

This Man made His cross a victory. I watched Him die. I soon saw how amazingly different He was from other victims of execution. His crucifiers merely killed His body: they never touched His soul! They could not: it was beyond their reach. His Soul was His own, to do with what He would! HE did not die; HE WAS SET FREE!

RUFUS:

Who was this Man?

SIMON (*reverently*):

I was audacious enough to ask one of the venomous priests. You will never guess his answer. (SIMON *rises, touches forehead, heart, lips, and eyes with exorcising fingers. Slowly he says,—*) This Carpenter of Galilee says . . . He is . . . THE MESSIAH!

(*There is another pause, of stunned awe.*)

RUFUS:

The Son of The Blessed!

ALEXANDER (*with bated breath*):

The Christ? The Ineffable and Eternal, the Brightness of Jehovah's Glory! The Anointed Saviour! The Prince of Peace

from on High! But . . . but THIS
CANNOT BE!

SIMON (*more slowly yet*):

I am not so sure.

RUFUS (*thunderstruck*):

Father!!!!

SIMON:

Of many, many things in this Man I am not yet sure. Yet I, who carried His cross and watched Him slowly die upon it, do testify that I beheld in Him a mystery and a triumph!

With Authority He prayed down forgiveness on the mercenaries who hammered in the hideous nails: with Authority He promised the penitent robber entrance into Paradise: with Authority He summoned Elijah from the highest Heavens; with strong peace and unspeakable, silent joy He launched His spirit forth from the riven body. I tell you, never man died like this Man!

(*The boys are deeply moved by their father's depth of emotion.*)

RUFUS (*putting his hand tentatively upon*

SIMON's garment):

Then, father, our Passover is not in vain?

ALEXANDER:

We have no Paschal lamb to take away
our sins and to bring us salvation!

SIMON:

I am not so sure! Perhaps we have! In
Him!

*(He stoops, takes up the cup of wine
and the plate of unleavened bread, and
steps within the tent. ALEXANDER and
RUFUS follow Him, looking dazedly at
each other, then trustfully at SIMON.
The curtain of the tent shuts them from
view.)*

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

*Mary of Magdala Returns Breathlessly to the
Upper Room, Telling an Astounding Tale!*

THE SCENE

THE SETTING is simple. Against a plain background, which suggests the wall of the Upper Room, stands a rough-hewn table spread with a linen cloth down the center and sundry earthenware dishes. At the end there is a chalice and a paten, prominently visible. Benches about the table. It is not necessary to provide a door in the wall; Mary may speak from outside the chancel at the first, or from behind the wall-screen, entering the area of the play as is most convenient in the given church.

Mary of Magdala is in white, with a purple cloak about her shoulders. She wears sandals. Her hair is disheveled. She may, if desired, wear a face veil, which will be removed as soon

as she enters. Mary the Mother is dressed in white, her head draped with a blue veil. She is pale and worn and seldom stirs. She is too spent to move. Susanna is comforting her.

THE CHARACTERS

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

SUSANNA

MARY OF MAGDALA

THE INCIDENT

(There is a frenzied knocking at the door. It is repeated. MARY THE MOTHER sits at the head of the table, numbly gazing at the chalice and paten, to which from time to time her hand caressingly steals.)

MARY OF MAGDALA *(without)* :

Let me in! Let me in!

(MARY THE MOTHER lifts her hand to her forehead as if dazed. SUSANNA holds her close.)

MARY OF MAGDALA :

Mary, Mother! Let me in! Quickly! Oh, quickly! !

(Still the MOTHER OF THE LORD does not rouse herself. SUSANNA protects her, her arms wrapped about her.)

MARY OF MAGDALA (*knocking again*):

Mary Mother, be not afraid! It is only
Mary of Magdala! Let me in!

(*The MOTHER opens her eyes to the
outer world, feebly motions SUSANNA
toward the door. SUSANNA goes to ad-
mit the Magdalen.*)

MARY OF MAGDALA (*terrified and shaken*):

Bar the door! Is anyone following me?

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD (*soothingly*):

Mary!

MARY OF MAGDALA (*whirling to face her*):

That is just as He said it!

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

My daughter, be not afraid. MARY!

MARY OF MAGDALA:

Just His tone!

SUSANNA (*quite evidently thinking that grief
has unbalanced the Magdalen's mind, en-
deavoring to calm her; herself almost
numb with grief*)

Mary!

MARY OF MAGDALA (*grasping her arms and
whispering intensely*):

Has the Master been here?

SUSANNA (*now quite certain she is not herself*):

My beloved! Calm yourself. Come, let
me hold you close.

MARY OF MAGDALA (*pulling away, insistent*):

Has the Master been here? Have you seen Him?

(SUSANNA *strokes her cheek and tries to lead her to the bench to seat her by her Mother.*)

MARY OF MAGDALA:

Do not look at me so! I am not possessed. I know what I am saying. Has the Lord come here?

SUSANNA:

Poor lass! Poor lass!

MARY OF MAGDALA:

I am not mad, Mother Mary. My wits have not fled. But I AM stunned. Shaken. Terrified. That I admit. I can see the Master has not been here yet or you would be as I am.

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

My pitiful dear, must I again say the word that He is crucified? Had you forgot it was not all a nightmare but tragic actuality?

MARY OF MAGDALA (*hushed and struggling for her poise*):

Oh, I know. I know far too well that the Lord Jesus was crucified. Even for an instant I cannot forget Golgotha. Can

the world ever forget? I wonder. (*She is shaken by a gust of emotion.*) Forget Golgotha? You were crucified with Him there. You died when He died. So was I crucified with Him. Nailed to His cross with the nails of my love for Him. Pierced to my death with the spear. So were all of us who loved Him. So were our hopes. So were our beliefs in all goodness. So was our God! No, I do not forget, Mother Mary.

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

Then . . . then . . . why ——?

MARY OF MAGDALA:

Have your eyes seen Him here? Today? Yes—alive! Mary, Mother of Jesus, and you, Susanna, Mother of Mark, look in my eyes. I am not lunatic. But I tell you the IMPOSSIBLE. It has happened. I . . . HAVE . . . SEEN . . . HIM . . . ALIVE!

(MARY THE MOTHER *and* SUSANNA *look at each other, pityingly and anguished.*)

MARY OF MAGDALA (*sitting down, looking off into space. Her voice hazy with awe*):

Alive! That is, alive in so different a fashion than we are alive that our word does not signify . . . Him! There is no word for the Jesus I have perceived—only for

a moment—down by the tomb where His dead body was laid. Alive? Alive in some way as far beyond our utmost aliveness as His soul was beyond ours!

(She is incoherent with emotion. She rises and paces the floor.)

SUSANNA:

What has happened to you?

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

Is it anything you can tell us, beloved? Have you perceived a vision, perhaps? Try to tell us, dear. It will help you to try.

MARY OF MAGDALA *(sinking again to the bench by the table. SUSANNA rises to be ready if she swoons.)*

I will make the attempt. Though my heart throbs so hard my breath almost leaves me. It is wellnigh impossible to speak coherently. There are no words, dears, for such a thing as has occurred to me. I do not wonder you take my terror and my amazement for the lunacy of an anguished soul, tortured past self-command.

You know we went out before sunrise? With spices and ointments and balm. (Are Mary the mother of James and Salome not yet returned? They fled ere I fled.)

With unguents for His broken body we went. Out into a world that had ended for us,—a dead world, unreal and fantastic; a world of which the appearance kept uncannily on, after the life of it had gone forth! Out into a world that had ended for truth, that had ended for honor and worth, for right and for love and for God. You too faced the sunrise this morning. With the ghastly fact balefully clear that everything we loved had crashed into nothingness! With the knowledge that the Master Himself, although we loved Him, was a failure. That God, if He were such as Jesus believed Him to be, was a failure as well. Wrong was victorious, Satan almighty. What was there left to believe? Do you feel thus this very instant? How else can you feel?

SUSANNA:

We have lived through the end of the world.

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

We are descended to hell.

MARY OF MAGDALA:

Beyond the end of the world lies heaven also. I think I must have glimpsed it,—down yonder at the tomb!

Give ear!

Down to that tomb we blundered, blinded by tears, vaguely wondering who would roll away the stone from its door for us. Almost fainting at the thought of the nearness of his maltreated, precious flesh; dreading our pitiful task of its anointing. We tiptoed furtively. Then gradually, through the blurring mist of agony, burned the perception of a Presence! (*She rises, as if witnessing it again.*) Mother Mary, do not count me bereft of senses; what I say is but soberest fact. I felt It; the certitude was immediate and enthralling. My heart stopped beating. With the ears of inmost awareness I heard a Voice. The Presence and the Voice were one. "He is risen! He is not here!" So the message rang into my soul's central consciousness.

I could not have questioned that Voice if I would. There was no denying its indisputable truth. If It spoke, it was so! My head whirled. These were words I must accept, yet they were only drumming on the surface of my mind. They had no meaning to my soul despite the clarity with

which I heard and acknowledged them. They were unmistakable, but they did not convey any reality. Amid the shadows that Presence shone as if with the moon's glimmering, blue-white sheen. The Voice did not so much speak and cease as it seemed unceasingly to be saying the timeless phrase, "Why seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen!" The others fled. I must have collapsed. Numb and trembling I lay upon the grass. How long I do not know.

SUSANNA:

Your cloak is sodden with the dew.

MARY OF MAGDALA (*going to her*):

Judge not too soon, blessed Mother. Help me, help me recount my bewildering experience. I need your aiding prayers for words to utter its miracle.

How long I lay prostrate I cannot guess. Dimly I felt another Presence. This was no strange, affrighting Presence. This was welcome and intimate, assuring and comforting. No angel this. My stupefied faculties decided it was some human friend approaching. Perhaps the gardener. My intuition was aware of his com-

passion. I sobbed out I know not what—absurd, halting, ill-considered words. My stubborn heart still held to the perverse reiteration of the Master's deadness: refusing to accept the word of His rising: repeating only, "He is not here! He is not here" and feeling the vast ache of a universe empty without Him! Out of this delirium I blurted my hopelessness.

(She stands straight. Rapt. Ecstatic.)
Then came a Voice. A new Voice this! The familiar Voice of the Master! The most loved Voice in the world! The Voice whose every inflection and color our love cherishes for always. Only my name did it speak. As no one else ever can say it, "MARY!"

It pulled me up to my knees. It summoned my acknowledgment. It opened my eyes. It flooded my spirit with its undeniable surety. THERE JESUS STOOD! Alive? There is no word for His aliveness. He was not merely existent: the vibrant vitality of His aliveness was now most of all of the Spirit. No doubt was possible. His aliveness PULSED. It captured. It vindicated itself by its radiant glory. Did

I see Him? My eyes experienced Him. Did I hear Him? My ears experienced Him. Did I perceive Him? My whole being experienced Him. I perceived what mere senses can never report. I was sure beyond sense-proof. His life touched my life.

(MARY THE MOTHER *drops to her knees, her face lifted but her eyes shut.*)

I did not need to touch. I did not need to investigate and reason. All at once I KNEW. His is a spiritual body now, unencumbered, untrammelled; set free from the inert, dead earth of us. We too have spiritual bodies, Mother, but how loaded with dust! We cannot do what we would: we are saturate with earth. He is all Life, with no dead inertness to clog His aliveness. Oh, now I see the crucifiers only touched and hurt the body of flesh and set Him at liberty from its dross! The Cross was His victory. He is delivered for New Life by the cross.

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD (*still kneeling, and repeating to herself*):

“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.”

MARY OF MAGDALA:

He is gone from my senses now. To Galilee and the disciples, perhaps. To lives in need of Him! To possess them as He now possesses mine! By His Newness of Life!

(She spreads her arms wide. She speaks with noble rapture.)

The world has begun again. This is the day of its new creation. It is the first day not only of the week but of the higher age. God is not cumbered by death. Our Christ is not conquered by death; it is not possible He should be holden of it; He is Life!

(She takes up the chalice and paten.)

Here are the cup and the plate. Just as He left them the other night. That other night back in the days of the world that has passed. The bread and wine are gone from them. Whither? Into the lives of His own, to be new strength, new warmth and glow by their self-giving.

The Master died, to live in us! Out of the chalice and paten of His flesh comes the Bread and Wine of His Risen Presence to be our new strength and new warmth, our new Life! His is indeed a new kind of life! Invulnerable! Invincible! Triumphant!

(MARY THE MOTHER OF THE LORD *ris*es from her knees. She embraces MARY OF MAGDALA, kissing her upon the forehead. She then takes the chalice.)

THE MOTHER OF THE LORD:

He who has risen is Resurrection. For
Us!

(*Exeunt*)



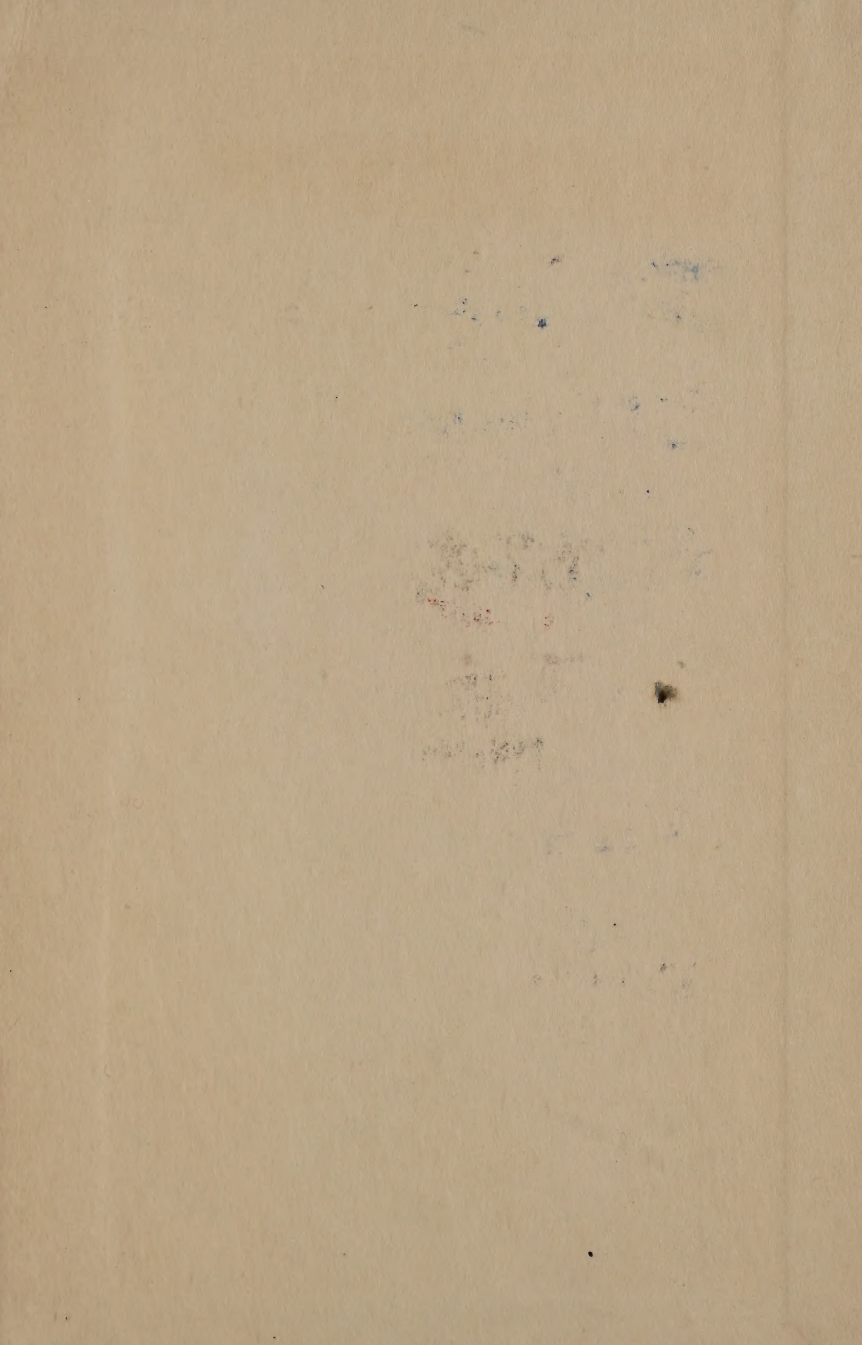
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